

Anew

by fethers

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Summary: Life has thrown a lot at Hiccup so when he finds himself living on the streets, it really shouldn't have been such a surprise. But even though he ran away from his home, his family, and everything he knew, he thinks it might just be better this way. Now, at least, he has people who care. (Eventual Hijack)

1. Chapter 1

E. Aster Bunnymund was not having a good day. He knew it wouldn't go well when the power went out the night before and he awoke to an alarm clock telling him he was two hours late for work. He didn't realize until he was nearly out the door that he was, in fact, almost an hour early and that his clock had reset itself sometime during the night. Things got worse when, not enough time to return to bed, he decided to make himself breakfast. He ended up with two pieces of burnt toast with peanut butter. He had no particular like of peanut butter toast, let alone burnt peanut butter toast, but he was out of jam. And of course, about five minutes into his twenty minute walk to work, the first crack of thunder sounded. Not even a minute later, rain began to fall in cascades from above. By the time Aster made it to work, he had nearly lost his shoe in the gutter, been attacked by a neighborhood Chihuahua, accidentally elbowed in the gut by an elderly woman with very bony elbows, and splashed by passing cars twice. To say he was in a bad mood would be an understatement. Work didn't really go any better for Aster. It was one of those days when he wondered why he had ever wanted to be a social worker. It was all paperwork and people who should have never become parents. He wasn't paid nearly enough for all the work he did.

By the time Aster was on his way back to his flat, he was about ready to bite the head off of the next person to cross him. So when someone ran into him on the street near the barbershop, he was not amused.

"Oi! Watch where you're going wanker!" he spat, reeling around to

face the offender. He was met with two pairs of green eyes. There were two young men, one maybe twenty and the other probably fourteen or fifteen. The older boy was tall with inky black hair and vivid green eyes. He wore a black military jacket and a pair of dark jeans that were just a bit too short for him. There was a bit of black ink peeking out under the collar of his jacket from some hidden tattoo. He was carefully helping the shorter one stand. Poor boy had nothing from his left knee down and had apparently taken quite a fall when they had collided so now of course he felt like a right ratbag. The boy was nearly lost in a work jacket several sizes too big with a patch on the right arm. He wore a work boot on his good leg and had his pant leg tied off beneath the other. His auburn hair fell messily on his forehead, covering a spattering of freckles that painted his skin like stars. While he tried to balance without falling back on his ass, the taller boy was all but growling at him, looking as though the only reason he hadn't jumped Aster yet was because he was supporting the shorter boy.

"Yeah, next time we'll just try and move out of the way faster, you know, with our crippled legs and all," the shorter boy said rolling his eyes and gesturing to the empty space below his knee. The taller one smirked, looking triumphant. Aster sighed and ran his hand down his face; sarcastic brat though he was, he had a point. Also, upon closer inspection, he saw a bit of plastic peeking out from underneath the hem of the taller boy's pants on his left leg. He had a prosthetic. They were both handicapped and he'd managed to barrel them over _and_ take out a day's worth of frustrations on them.

"Alright, fine. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to knock ya over mate, or yell at ya and what not. It's been a rough day," Aster said with some effort, not really feeling up to admitting his fault but the shorter one looked like he was just a kid. He really wasn't planning on starting any fights with a kid. The taller, dark haired boy scoffed, rolling his eyes.

"It's alright, no harm done," the shorter one said, trying to shift his weight so he was more comfortable leaning against his friend.

'The poor bloke doesn't even have a pair of crutches with him,' Aster thought, taking in the duo's appearance more carefully. Their shirts were thin and the hems were frayed, neither one looking warm enough for the quickly cooling weather. Their faces and hair were greasy though for the most part combed and well kept. Their shoes looked as though they would fall apart any moment. In all, Aster was fairly certain they were homeless. He'd seen the look before, and he'd seen kids like that fall pretty hard. Not all of his cases were success stories. In fact, more often than not they ended up helping no one. Eventually, the guilt got to him and he spoke up.

"What do you say, to make up for it, I buy you guys a meal or something," Aster shrugged, fully anticipating the suspicious looks that followed.

"We're," the shorter boy cleared his throat, "we're not prostitutes you know!"

He had _not_ anticipated that. That was the first time anyone had accused him ofâ€¦proposition someone like that.

"No!" Aster answered hastily, "I didn't mean that," he held his hands up to show he meant no harm. "Look, I just meant it looks like the two of you could use a decent meal and I feel bad for knockin' ya over like that."

The two looked at each other and had a silent argument he couldn't follow in the slightest. One of them would shake their head and the other would roll their eyes or sigh until eventually the shorter one turned back to Aster.

"Thank you, but we're fine," he said, shaking his head and sending his auburn hair flying as he did. Aster sighed, that wasn't the answer he'd been hoping for. He knew how sensitive these issues were and he knew forcing it would do more harm than good.

"Alright," he relented, "but listen. I'm going to give you this card, it's got an address for a place you can go if you ever need food or clothes or a place to sleep, alright mate? Promise me that if you ever get into trouble you'll go there and ask for Aster."

They looked at each other again, but the older boy reached out to take the card Aster offered.

"Thank you sir," the younger one nodded, his face reddening a bit.

"Oi now, stop getting all shy on me. What happened to the snarky bloke I met earlier?" Aster said, nudging the boy's shoulder lightly.

"He was run over by a large Australian man," he muttered and the taller boy snickered and, well, even Aster had to laugh at that.

"Right, well, take care of yourselves and don't go losin' that card there," Aster nodded, deciding he wasn't going to be able to do much else for them now.

"Er," the younger one stumbled over his words, "yeah, thanks. Don't, um, go running over any more cripples then."

"I'll do my best," he took a chance and ruffles the kid's hair, offering the taller one a smile, then turned to continue on towards his flat. The whole encounter had surprisingly improved his mood quite a bit, and he hoped it would not be the last time he saw the two. He was a bit worried about the kid's leg though. Ankle biter didn't have a prosthetic or wheelchair or even an old pair of crutches. He decided if they chose to visit the center he would have at least something ready for him, though he didn't know where he would get anything.

'Guess I could ask North,' he thought. The older man usually had a solution for everything, even if he got on his nerves sometimes. When he got back to the flat, he changed out of his work clothes and decided to go visit his friend for advice. He was never an easy man to find. There were only three places he ever frequented but he would flit between them with such frequency Aster could never pin him down. Given the time of day, Aster's best guess was that he would be at the small ice cream shop he owned as a side project.

North was a wealthy man, having inherited a factory back in Russia and amassing quite a bit of money. In his retirement, he came to America and spent most of his time in his workshop making toys and doodads for children. Some of it he would sell but most of it he would donate to children in need. Every Christmas he was their biggest donor, going as far as to dress up as Santa for the children, and the resemblance was striking. With his extra money (the lucky fucker) he opened up a small ice cream shop and worked it part time year round. Of course, going to find North at the shop meant having to deal with Jack.

Jack had been one of his cases at first, and right from the start they had butted heads. They found Jack unconscious on the iced over pond in the forest to the north of town with only a sweatshirt to keep him warm and no shoes on his feet. When he woke up and couldn't remember anything but his name they had sent him Aster's way. Boy did that kid have a mouth on him too. Always causing trouble and playing tricks. Underneath it all though, he was a kind bloke. Jack always took care of the younger children in foster care, himself being fifteen at the time. He loved to make them laugh and would do just about anything if it meant protecting them. Still, he was being sent from home to home, causing trouble everywhere he went and nothing Aster would say seemed to help. Though, he could admit, his temper certainly wasn't an asset in dealing with the boy. It wasn't until North took an interest in him that his life began to turn around. Aster remembered North saying all the boy needed was someone to believe in him so that he could believe in himself (or at least that's what he thought he said, it was hard to tell sometimes underneath the thick Russian accent). When North had first taken Jack in, the boy rebelled.

"I hope you don't expect me to treat you like a father, because you'll never be mine," he had said with petulance only Jack could hope to muster up. North was not fazed.

"Then you are mistaken," he said, placing his large hands on the boys shoulders. "I expect you to treat me like family, because from now on, I treat you like son. You must learn to like it."

Aster was sure he'd never laughed so hard in his life. Jack had come around with time though. Now he was working at the ice cream shop and even helped volunteer at the center with North.

When Aster reached the shop, a small place called 'The North Pole,' the clouds had cleared from the sky and the sun was beginning to fall past the horizon. A bitter chill still clung to the air and he would have been genuinely surprised to find anyone actually partaking in a frozen treat at this time of year. His assumption was right, as he walked he found the shop empty save for Jack behind the counter trying to balance a quarter on his nose.

"He Bunny," he said, his blue eyes (artificially colored with contacts) crossed slightly to try and look at the coin. The name came from his unfortunate surname. Bunnymund. He would have changed it if he didn't have so much respect for his parents. "Didn't expect to see you in here on a day like this. Couldn't live without me?"

"Whatever you say Frostbite-" an 'affectionate' nickname Aster had

given the boy given the state in which the boy was found "-is North in?"

"Yeah, he's in the back. Why?" Jack gave up on the quarter and straightened out his neck, cracking it one way then another. He took a moment to fix his hair, bleached white shortly after he was put under Aster's care, in the reflection of the display before turning back to the social worker.

"Nothing really, just had favor ta ask," Aster shrugged.

"Whatever." Jack turned and called out for the older man, "Yo, North! Bunny's here for you!"

"Aster! Friend!" North came out of the back door, wiping his hands of some sort of grease, "what I can do for you?"

"Hey North," Aster held out his hand, knowing if he didn't take the initiative and turn their greeting into a handshake, it would end up as a bone crushing hug. Unfortunately he didn't have much of a choice either way, North stepped out into the customer area, laughing as he took his hand and used it to pull the smaller man into a hug, lifting him off the ground in the process.

"Air, North," Aster gasped, "I need air."

"Of course friend," North gave him one last squeeze then set him back on the ground.

"Good to see you too mate," Aster straightened his clothes out, "but I actually do have a reason for coming over."

"Yes, of course, what do you need?"

North squeezed himself into a booth and motioned for Aster to do the same. Jack stayed behind the counter, trying again to balance the quarter.

"I met these kids on the way home today, I can't be sure but I think they're homeless. Anyways, they were both handicapped, missing their left legs. The older one had a prosthetic but the other didn't have anything, like not even a pair of crutches. So, I remembered Jack broke his leg being an idiot a while back and thought maybe you'd still have the crutches."

"That is terrible news," North nodded solemnly, "I'm not sure we still have them.

"Jack," he called, "do we still have crutches in house?"

"What, I don't know. They might be in the basement. Why? Did Aster finally snap and break some poor bastard's leg?" Jack leaned over the counter so he could see the pair, dropping his quarter in the process.

North laughed, "No," he said. "Aster has case with handicapped child."

"It's not really a case," Aster shrugged, "I literally just ran into them. Honest to God knocked a child with one leg to the ground then

yelled at him." Aster dropped his head into his hands, it sounded even worse when he said it out loud.

"Holy crap man," Jack snickered, "how am I the bad one?"

"It gets worse," Aster groaned.

"How can that possibly get worse?"

"I offered to buy them food and they accused me of soliciting prostitution. Like I would try and pick up some fourteen year old boy on the streets."

Jack was nearly doubled over with laughter now. "That's perfect, oh my God. I need to give this kid a high five or something."

"Ha-ha," Aster's voice full of sarcasm. "Anyways, the kid couldn't walk, the older one was practically carrying him, so I thought if I saw them again or they came to the center I could have something waiting for them. Crutches are better than nothing I guess."

"Of course," North nodded, "you are good man Aster. We will look at home and call you tomorrow if we find."

"Thanks mate," Aster smiled then moved to change the subject, "so how's the putting Jack through college thing going?"

"Is good! He is working hard at school and still has time for the shop. Money is not problem but he insists on paying for part of it."

"Can't be a mooch forever," Jack called.

"Yeah? And how much do you mooch with all yer hair bleach and fake eyes?" Aster asked, raising his eyebrows.

"Hey, I still have to look good. Beauty is costly, sir," Jack gave a little huff, making a show out of sweeping the hair out of his face.

"Whatever you say brat," Aster snorted. "You pick a major yet?"

"Nah, I'm still exploratory. Most of my classes are just plain boring."

"Just never become a social worker, trust me there." Aster wouldn't give his job up for anything, but that wasn't to say he would ever wish it upon anyone else. And as much as he antagonized Jack, he really did want him to do big things with his life.

"Why not? Apparently you make enough you can waste some on underage prostitutes, seems like a good life to me," Jack smirked, wiggling his eyebrows a few times.

>"This is why I don't like ya, mate," Aster chucked a crumpled up napkin at the boy.<p>

"You wound me so," Jack batted away the napkin then clutched his hand over his heart dramatically. "I will never be able to trust again."

"Good, I hope you become a hermit and never leave the house again."

Aster and North talked, with the occasional quips from Jack, until closing time when they went their separate ways. Aster returned to his flat and North drove himself and Jack home to their house just outside of town. Jack trudged around the basement until he found three porcelain elves, a giant fur coat that reeked of moth balls, and an old trumpet but no crutches. As a last resort, he ventured to the attic and, amidst cobwebs and dust, he found them leaning against the far wall. Unfortunately, there was a pile of cardboard boxes and trash bags blocking his way. Jack sighed, resigning himself to climbing over the mess. He made it about halfway before the boxes, softened from the humidity, collapsed under his weight. He cursed as he fell forward, scraping his arm against a nail and hitting his head on a beam.

"Fuck," he hissed, examined the scratch on his arm, "if I get tetanus from this, I swear I'll kill Bunny."

"Jack?" he heard North call from downstairs, "you are alright up there?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I just tripped over some old stuff."

"Did you find crutches?"

"Yeah, I'll be down in a second. But if I have to get anything else from up here I'm going to be the one needing crutches."

Jack managed to get the crutches and make it back downstairs without further injury. North was waiting for him at the bottom of the ladder to the attic. He laughed when he saw the dust in Jack's hair and the bruise forming on his forehead.

"Let us never do favors for Bunny again," Jack said, handing the man the crutches, "I don't think I can handle it."

"Think of how that poor boy will feel though, to be able to walk again," North patted his back roughly, sending Jack stumbling a step or two forward, "all thanks to you."

"Thanks to Cupcake breaking my leg you mean," Jack said, smiling slightly at the memory. It wasn't really the poor girl's fault, but he never let her live it down. "I should probably go to sleep now. I have class in the morning."

"Alright Jack, goodnight," North ruffled the boy's hair and sent him on his way, smiling as he watched him.

Aster saw neither hide nor hair of either boy from the streets for three weeks. He had picked up the crutches from North and had them waiting in his flat but he was beginning to think he wouldn't get the chance to offer them. Until one day, after work, he received a call from the center.

"Aster?" the soft voice of a volunteer asked over his cell phone.

"Yes, hello. This is Aster," he responded, a little impatient being called at such a late hour.

"Hi, this is Katelyn at Guardians Center. There's a boy here asking for you. He says you gave him our card and said to ask for you?"

"Is he by any chance missing a leg?"

"Yes sir, he is. I'm not entirely sure how he managed to make here at all, he was waiting outside when I got in this morning."

"He's alone then?" that was curious.

"Yes."

"Alright, I'll come over. Tell him I'll be there in half an hour."

"Of course, thank you."

Aster hung up the phone and started getting dressed to go out. He had already changed into clothes for sleeping and was about to hit the sack when he got the call. He grabbed the crutches and headed over to the center, stopping to grab a cup of coffee on the way. When he made it to the center a young volunteer was waiting for him. He led Aster to the back of the large open room where the young boy was sitting against the wall, weaving through the masses of people huddled around.

"Hey kid, was starting to think you'd never show up," Aster said as way of a greeting.

"Hey," he muttered back, not really looking up. In all, he looked a bit worse than last time. There was a smear of dirt on his cheeks and his hair was greasy.

"So, where's your friend?"

"Out and about," the boy shrugged.

"That so?" Aster raised his eyebrows. "Well, since you don't have your human wheelchair, I thought you could use something to get around." Aster held the crutches out for him and the boy's eyes widened.

"Crutches? How did you evenâ€¦"

"Had a friend, well more of a pain in my ass, who had a pair he didn't need any more. Noticed you may have needed them and thought it couldn't hurt to offer." Aster set the crutches down on the floor and sat down next to him, grunting a bit when he did. "Ugh, don't ever get old kid."

"You can't be that old," the kid snorted, giving Aster a look from the corner of his eyes.

"Older than you-don't give me that look. Alright, I'm twenty-five, what are you? Fourteen?"

"Hey, I'm seventeen. How could you possible mistake all this

manliness," he gestured to himself, "for a fourteen year old kid. I'm offended."

"Whatever you say," Aster laughed, "so, you got a name?"

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III," he said bluntly, avoiding Aster's eye.

"No seriously."

"Look, I don't go by my old name anymore, so I got a new one."

"And you couldn't have picked something normal like Steve or Bill or--"

"E. Aster Bunnymund?" and boy did that kid have a lot of sass stuffed into such a scrawny body.

"Hah, aren't you funny. At least I don't call myself Hiccup."

"And after all the trouble I went through to get here," 'Hiccup' rolled his eyes.

"I've been meaning to ask about that. Just how did you make it here?" Aster looked down at the space where his left foot would be then back up to his face.

"Toothless dropped me off here."

"Toothless? Let me guess, you're friend from the other day?" Aster laughed.

"You have a real problem with our names don't you? Yeah, that was Toothless." Neither of them said anything for a little while after that, though Hiccup would fidget every so often. He seemed to want to say something, but couldn't find the courage to do so. Finally the boy spoke up, "Hey," he smiled a little awkwardly, "do you mind if I try the crutches out?"

"Sure, go ahead," Aster said with a chuckle. He stood and brushed off the dust from his pants before holding his hand out to Hiccup. With some effort and help from Aster the boy managed to stand with just the wall as support. Aster picked up the crutches and handed them to the boy. Hiccup tried to balance against the wall and fit the supports underneath his arms at the same time. They were too tall for him and he looked ridiculous at first but Hiccup managed to find out how to adjust them so they would fit his height. When he finally got them adjusted correctly and could balance himself without the wall he gave this huge sideways smile that just kind of made warmed Aster's heart.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Aster patted his shoulder (gently, he didn't think his sense of guilt could take knocking the boy over again), "start walking." And maybe Hiccup took that as a challenge because he laughed and began testing the movements of the crutches. He was slow at first, seeing how they moved and how he could balance, but he got the hang of them quickly and could soon navigate the room without falling. Aster just smiled and watched, glad now more than ever he had given out the center's card.

"This is great," Hiccup laughed and sat down, a bit out of breath, "I mean, it's not a proper prosthetic and it kind of hurts under my arms after a while, but I haven't been able to walk on my own since, well," he shrugged instead of continuing.

"Since when? How'd you lose your leg Hiccup?" Aster asked softly as he sat back down next to him.

"Hey now, I can't give away all my secrets right away like that. I have to keep that aura of mystery about or I'll lose all my fans," Hiccup scolded, leaning his head against the wall. He still wasn't quite able to keep the smile off his face. "But really, thanks. I guess it doesn't mean much, but, you know, it's nice or-wow I'm bad at this talking thing."

Aster had to laugh at that. This kid was layer upon layer of awkward and sarcasm all wrapped in a scrawny freckled body. "Yeah, you kind of are," he said, "but I'll forgive you just this once. Besides, it wasn't a big deal. The little pain in the ass didn't need them anymore; literally rotting away in the attic I was told."

"Still, do you think you could thank him for me too?" Hiccup was fidgeting again, picking at the hem of his shirt with his fingers and avoiding Aster's gaze.

"Nope, you can thank him yourself though. He works at an ice cream place, I'll take you there and even get a scoop, on me," Aster elbowed the boy playfully.

"I'm not five you know. You can't bribe me with ice cream."

"No? Not even a North Pole special sundae with all the toppings?"

"Not even for a North Pole special sundae with all the toppings. Though I could maybe, just possibly, be tempted with black raspberry. I have a weakness, what can I say," and there was that little awkward smile again.

"You have good taste, mate," Aster patted his shoulder, "that happens to be my favorite flavor. Tomorrow then, I'll stop by here after work, you had better be waiting, and we'll stop by and thank ol' Jack for his generous donation. Deal?" he held out his hand and Hiccup took it with an exasperated sigh.

"Deal."

2. Chapter 2

When Toothless had taken him to The Guardians center, he was sure he was going to have a miserable time. Not only would he be without his best, and only really, friend, he would be spending it in a homeless shelter. Two years ago the only way he'd be in a homeless shelter would be to volunteer, but look at him now. Still, if he had to do it all over again. Knowing what he did now, he was sure he'd end up in the same place without regret.

Toothless had promised (not in so many words, or words at all really, his friend was mute) to return "soon", safe and sound. He had also

outright refused to take Hiccup with him, or even tell him where he was going. To say Hiccup was pissed would be an understatement. This was the first time in a year Hiccup would be apart from Toothless for any extended period of time and he didn't trust him enough to tell him where he was going? He had a guess of course, though he hoped it wasn't true. The only place Hiccup could think of that Toothless wouldn't take him was Berk, home. He would have forced Toothless to take him with him, except there wasn't much he could do. Toothless had taken him to the center then turned and walked away. Hiccup couldn't even run after him thanks to that darn leg of his.

Hiccup was already planning on not talking to Toothless for at least a month, maybe more. Realistically, he wouldn't last nearly that long. With neither of them talking, the silence would become unbearable pretty quick and Hiccup had a habit of awkwardly rambling a lot. He would probably give him the cold shoulder for a few hours until he cracked. Toothless would probably buy him fish, which he thought was a delicacy and Hiccup only pretended to like because of how it made him smile. Still, there wasn't much else he could do while stuck here other than plan out how to make Toothless feel guilty.

But Aster helped. Hiccup was hesitant to actually call the man so he didn't end up asking a volunteer until later in the evening. As soon as she dialed the phone, he regretted it. The man was probably sleeping and Hiccup would be waking him up. He should have waited until the next day. He felt like an idiot for that, and tried to avoid looking at the man when he finally arrived, afraid he'd be angry. Instead, he laughed at Hiccup's sarcastic quips and brought him crutches. Maybe it wasn't much to Aster, but crutches. He could walk, or hobble at least, by himself again. He had, pessimistic as he was, pretty much conceded to never walking again. And he was taking him to thank however had donated the crutches in addition to buying him ice cream. Ice cream. He probably thought he was nothing but a kid, that he was lying about his age. Curse his scrawny body. He was going to turn down the request, he really was, but Aster had given him this look, that cocky little smirk that just looked kind of handsome

Fuck

Okay, so maybe he had a little bit of a crush, but it wasn't his fault and besides, it was only a baby one (and who could resist that accent?). Still, the thought made stomach twist so much he barely ate any of the soup they served at lunch, despite how starving he was. Why couldn't he ever just have a crush on people he had a chance with? Or better yet, why couldn't he be some straight jock like his cousin? Then he wouldn't have had any problems back in Berk. No, actually, he took that back. He never wanted to be like Snorri "Snotlout" Jorgenson.

When Aster arrived at the center, Hiccup nearly relented to the desire to run and hide but instead just offered a little smile, hoping his dumb buck teeth didn't look too awkward.

"Hey fishbone," Aster said, ruffling the boy's hair. Hiccup couldn't decide whether he liked that particular gesture or not, but he let it go for now.

"Ha, ha, ha, I'm a scrawny fishbone," Hiccup said

sarcastically.

"Sure are," he smirked, "ready to go? Do you think you can make it a couple of blocks with those babies?"

Hiccup nodded, "I think so."

"Alright, follow me Fishbone."

"Is that going to stick?" Hiccup groaned. "Because I'm not sure I like that one."

"Whatever you say, Fishbone."

They slowly made their way to the shop, at about half the pace Aster could have gone on his own. He had tried to pull some more information out of the boy, but Hiccup would deflect him with little quips or snarky remarks and Aster didn't push the boundaries. When they arrived at the shop, Aster held the door open to allow Hiccup to enter. The little bell on the door rang and the boy behind the counter jolted at the sound.

"Hey, how can I help you?" he said, quickly hiding something in his hands underneath the counter.

"Oi, Frostbite," Aster joined Hiccup inside before he could respond, "you actually doin' any work in here or just goofing off like always?"

"Hey Bunny," the boy smirked and relaxed a bit, "I see the crutches are being put to good use."

"Well, that's why we're here," Aster said, putting his hand on Hiccup's shoulder, "he wanted to thank you."

"Er, yeah," Hiccup stammered, "thanks for finding these for me, it really means a lot and, well yeah."

"He's not so great with the words," Aster sighed, patting Hiccup's shoulder lightly in an attempt to soothe the awkward boy.

"I can see that," the other boy laughed, "but really, don't mention it, the bruises have already faded. Name's Jack by the way, nice to meet you."

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III," he said, blank faced and simple. Aster was trying not to laugh at the name again though Jack was not so kind.

"Seriously?" the boy said between giggles, "is that like, your real name? Oh my God, you're parents must have hated you!"

"Seems that way," Hiccup muttered, starting to regret this trip.

"Oh wow, I wish I had come up with something like that when I was found. I would kill to have a name like Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III."

"If you really want, you can try for Hiccup Horrendous Haddock IV," Hiccup smirked a little.

"No way, I'm way older than you so I get to be the second or something."

"I'm seventeen!" Hiccup groaned, "Why does everyone assume I'm prepubescent."

"Because that's how you look. But I'm still older, eighteen." Jack should not have looked that proud of being one year older.

"Congratulations, I do hope you're proud of your accomplishments," Hiccup rolled his eyes and Jack decided he liked him. The younger boy was undoubtedly awkward, but he was also a sassy little fuck. Jack liked that.

"You going to actually serve us, mate, or are you just gonna stand there insulting customers?" Aster cut in. He had watched the two interact and decided bringing Hiccup here was a good idea. He had, admittedly, considered the idea of Jack being a good influence when he offered to bring the boy here. If nothing else, meeting someone else his own age might help draw him out of his shell.

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever you want. Fucking overgrown kangaroo," the last part Jack muttered under his breath, though not quite quiet enough that Aster could not hear it.

"What'd you say Frostbite? What did I say about calling me that?" In one quick movement that nearly knocked Hiccup to the ground, Aster jumped over the counter and caught Jack in a head lock. The boy struggled and tried to pry his head loose but Aster held strong.

"Wallaby then?" Jack asked, halfway between a gasp and laughter. Aster decided that deserved a noogie. Jack struggled harder, trying to disguise laughter with yells for help. Hiccup stared, wide eyed at the duo, not knowing whether to chuckle or run. Their relationship intrigued him; it was nice. Toothless was his first real friend, and though they teased each other, Toothless tended to be a lot gentler with Hiccup. In fact, if anyone tried to do that to him, Toothless would probably try and bite their heads off.

Hiccup was brought out of his thoughts when a large man with unkempt facial hair came up behind Aster and whacked him on the back of his head.

"Employees only," the man barked. Aster released Jack and rubbed the spot on his head.

"Sorry Phil," he said, a little sheepishly, and hopped back over the counter. Phil rolled his eyes and disappeared back into the employees section of the shop. Jack was nearly doubled over with laughter, pounding his fist against the counter and gasping for breath.

"Oh man," he snorted in amusement, "that was perfect. You're not scared of that ol' yeti are you?"

"Shut up, Frostbite, we're ready to order," Aster snarled with no real spite.

"You sure about that?" Jack smirked, "because your friend's looking a bit like a doe in the headlights." He wasn't lying. Hiccup was a bit at a loss over how to react. When he came here, he expected to thank the boy then maybe talk with Aster awkwardly over ice cream before returning to the center. He was certainly not expecting this. He would be lying, though, if he said he didn't kind of enjoy it.

"You would be wrong to assume, Mr. Frost," Hiccup narrowed his eyes playfully, pointing at the white haired boy and pulling from Aster's nickname for the boy, "I'll have you know I am a very manly buck in the headlights, not just any old doe."

"My mistake," Jack was laughing again, holding his hands up in surrender, "so, oh manliest of bucks and his wallaby friend, what'll it be."

"Just get us two medium black raspberry," Aster said.

"Sure thing, cone or cup? That's a trick question of course, the answer is always cone. Cups are for pansies."

"Whatever, just step on it."

Jack took Aster's money and went back to get the ice cream while Aster led Hiccup to a booth, helping him sit down then setting the crutches aside.

"Sorry about Jack, I should have warned you about him," Aster said once he settled in.

"No, it's fine. I don't mind," Hiccup said quickly, "but if I ever need a sling or something, maybe you could break his arm or something to get me the hand me down?"

"That I may just be able to do," Aster snorted, "you be sure to keep me updated on that front."

"Will do."

Aster was about to ask something else, but before he could a large man, larger than Phil from earlier, burst into the shop. Hiccup jumped in his seat when the door swung open loudly. The man's stature and beard could only have been bested by his father's and maybe Gobber's.

"Aster!" the man all but roared warmly, "my friend, good to see you again. What is the occasion?"

"Hey North," Aster cringed slightly at the booming sound of the Russian man, "Hiccup here wanted to thank Jack and you for the crutches."

"Hiccup, that is word for-" North made a little noise like a hiccup "-yes?"

"It's his name!" Jack exclaimed with amusement, coming from behind the counter with the ice creams. He handed one to Aster and Hiccup each.

"And he is boy who got crutches, yes?"

"Yeah, that's him."

"I see. Is nice to meet you, Hiccup. I am Nicholas but you may call me North," the man held out a massive hands and Hiccup could see the little bits of a tattoo peeking out from beneath his sleeve. Hiccup, after a moment's hesitation, accepted the man's hand and was nearly jerked out of his seat by the vigorous handshake.

"Nice to meet you, sir," Hiccup said meekly, avoiding the man's gaze.

"No sir, please, just North," the man laughed, "I am glad to see you received crutches. Do they work?"

"They were a little big at first, but we got them adjusted so they work very well. I really appreciate it. It means a lot to be able to hobble around on my own."

"Anything to help a child in need," North laughed, kind and booming,

"Man, I couldn't wait to get off the crutches when I broke my leg. I can't imagine not having a leg at all," Jack said, eyeing the severed limb none too secretively. Aster hissed at him for being impolite but Jack ignored him.

"Well, you know how it is. I was just tired of the old thing so I took it off for a while. But those darned trolls must have stolen it while I wasn't looking because I haven't been able to find it since," Hiccup joked awkwardly and North laughed even louder, pushing Aster aside so he could sit next to him in the rounded booth. Jack pulled up a chair and sat backwards in it at the end on the table, resting his chin against the back rest.

"In all honesty," Hiccup continued, "I would really like to get a prosthetic, but I don't think that's really an option now."

"Yeah? How much do they cost?" Jack asked.

"The cheapest ones are about 5,000 dollars, but it would be hard even if I had the money. I can't just go out and buy one at Walmart."

"You don't want to be sent back home? Are you from an abusive family?" Jack leaned forward a bit in the chair, lifting two of the legs off the floor.

"Jack," Aster hissed, "you can't just ask people that. How would you have felt if someone asked you that three years back?"

"I don't think I would have cared," Jack shrugged, "I mean, for all I know my family was abusive. I don't remember."

"I wasn't beaten," Hiccup cut in before they could discuss it any further. "As long as you don't count the kids at school," he added under his breath.

"So," Aster spoke quickly, cutting off Jack who had opened his mouth to ask another question, "when do you expect your friend back?"

"I don't know" Hiccup frowned, still mad at Toothless for leaving like that, "he wouldn't tell me. Not that he could tell me, he's mute, but he could have found some way to let me know."

"Ah!" North suddenly slammed his palm down on the table causing everyone to jump in their seats. Jack nearly fell to the floor when he lost balance in his chair. "That reminds me. Sandy will be here any second. You wish to stay Aster?"

Aster shook his head, "I'd like to, but I should take Hiccup back."

"That's alright," Hiccup said, not wanting to be a bother, "I can make it back on my own. I know the way."

"Nonsense, both of you," North laughed, "he can stay and keep Jack company. We drive him back later."

"That's really okay, I can make it back," Hiccup insisted.

"Is no trouble. Jack, go and show Hiccup the shop. Sandy will be here soon," North ushered Jack out of his chair. Aster gave Hiccup a small apologetic smile but didn't offer any help, he supposed it was probably a lost cause at this point anyways. When Hiccup was situated on the crutches he sighed, did words actually come out of his mouth and people just didn't listen? or was he speaking some strange foreign language. He followed Jack through the back none-the-less.

"Sorry about that, he likes new people a lot," Jack chuckled when they made it to the back room. The man from earlier, Phil, was in their reading a book. He raised his eyebrows questioningly when the boys answered and Jack just shrugged and told him Sandy was coming for a visit. Phil groaned and left the room without a word.

"Phil on the other handâ€¦" Jack laughed when the large man was out of earshot. The back room was like a little employee lounge with a couch, a card table with four chairs, and a small coffee maker. It was where Jack spent most of his breaks, usually falling asleep on the couch.

"Sooo," Jack drawled, "what do you like to do?"

"I don't know if you caught this earlier, but I'm kind of homeless," Hiccup said, dragging his hand down his face, "there's not a lot I get to do for fun."

"Yeah, sorry," Jack looked around uncomfortably, "Ana thinks I'm kind of lacking in the social graces. In my defense, I'm an amnesiac. Have no memories from before I was fifteen, or at least I think I was fifteen. Aster was my social worker and North adopted me, so that's how I know them."

"You really just kind of say whatever's in your head, don't you?" Hiccup chuckled flopping down onto the couch.

"I've got nothing to hide," he sat down next to Hiccup and spread his arms out wide, "ask me anything and I shall answer."

"No thanks, you're not really that interesting."

"Oh, Sir Haddock, you wound me," Jack fell back onto the couch, clutching his heart dramatically, "why I could just crawl in a hole and die."

"And you, Sir Frost, have been reading too many Harlequin romance novels," Hiccup clucked his tongue.

"What can I say, they just set fire to my loins," Jack snorted, still lying down on the couch.

"You should probably see a doctor about that, sounds like a problem." Hiccup gave Jack the most dead pan look that Jack couldn't keep up the act anymore. He laughed and nudged Hiccup with his foot.

"You're alright, you know that?" Jack said, sitting up abruptly. He punched the other boy lightly in the shoulder causing him to groan and rub his arm.

"Was that really necessary? Ow, gods, why would you do that?" Hiccup groaned, "you've just hit a cripple. What kind of person hits a cripple?"

"Please, it was only a love tap," Jack laughed and rolled his eyes.

"I knew love was supposed to hurt, but I didn't think it would be like this, I think you bruised me," Hiccup pouted. "This doesn't mean we're engaged or anything does it? I was hoping to marry someone, you know, attractive."

"Hey!" Jack pointed an accusing finger at Hiccup, "say what you will about me, but never let it be said that I am not attractive. I am one handsome fucker."

"Modest too," Hiccup snorted.

"If you work hard enough, maybe someday you could be as amazing as me," Jack crossed his arms and nodded sagely, as though he were giving some great advice. "There's not much I can do about those looks though."

"I happen to know the whole tough guy, living on the streets, rebel without a cause type is considered sexy thank you very much," Hiccup huffed in fake annoyance.

"Yeah? And where do we find one of those because I haven't seen any about?"

"Flea markets," Hiccup said, very seriously.

"Well I've been looking in all the wrong places apparently. I've gotta get me to a flea market."

"If you're lucky you'll get there when there's a two for one special."

"That how Aster found you and your friend? I thought the whole running you over on the sidewalk story was suspicious."

"Why do I have a feeling you're trying to compare me to a common prostitute?" Hiccup peered at Jack through narrowed eyes.

"Hah!" Jack laughed. "I wasn't thinking that, but Aster did tell me that story too. I only wish I could have been there to see his face."

"It wasn't funny," Hiccup buried his face in his hands, making a small groaning noise in the back of his throat, "I was honestly scared."

"Yeah, Aster's all rough and tough at first, but then you realize he's just a giant fluffy bunny all full of sunshine and rainbows," Jack snorted. Hiccup smiled, small and warm.

"Yeah," he said quietly, picking at the hem of his shirt sleeves again, "I think it was really lucky he ran into us."

"I know what you mean. I know it comes off like I don't really like the guy, but he's really done a lot for me. He's a good guy," Jack gave an uncomfortable little half smile then, feeling uncomfortable offering such praise for Aster, quickly added, "if only he'd pull his head out his ass once in a while."

"You said you had amnesia?" Hiccup asked, remembering full well what he had said but not knowing how else to broach the subject.

"Yup, can't remember a thing," Jack smiled, almost as though he were proud of this fact, "other than, you know, how to read, write, ride a bike, things like that."

"And they just gave you a new life?"

"I guess," Jack shrugged, "I was thrown around foster homes for a while. Nobody really adopts the older kids and I was a bit of a problem child-" Hiccup snorted here, being able to fully imagine that "-so anyways, it was tough for a little bit. But North and Aster, and Ana and Sandy too, they helped me pull it together and here I am. Do I get the honor or hearing your story or are you keeping that mysterious street rat appearance up?"

"It's a long story," Hiccup shrugged, not really willing to tell the whole thing but feeling obliged to give him at least the bare bones. "I wasn't really accepted at home and some things happened and I left. I ran away and it's been just me and my friend ever since then."

"You couldn't have hung in there till you were eighteen at least and left for college or work or something?"

"Not really," Hiccup squirmed just a bit, a little uncomfortable on the spot, "I still want to go to school, I just have to wait until I'm eighteen then I can start saving up money. I'll get my GED and find some small community college if I can."

"Yeah, but you need ID and stuff to get into college or even for a lot of jobs, and trust me, it's not easy getting a new identity."

"I know, I brought my birth certificate and social security card and

everything with me when I left. I just have to wait until I'm old enough I can do what I want."

"You really thought this through. Was it really that bad at home?"

"It wasn't too bad," Hiccup was sure that if he picked anymore at the hems of his shirt sleeves they would fall apart, "I mean, I love my dad, he's the only family I have, but things happened and it was pretty obvious I wasn't welcome as I was."

"You don't have to say if you don't want," Jack said, seeming to have noticed Hiccup's squirming, "Bunny says I don't know when to shut my mouth."

"It's alright, that is, I wouldn't have said anything if I didn'tâ€¦ yeah," Hiccup sighed, once again cursing his inability to form sentences other people would actually understand. Jack was laughing at him now and Hiccup was pretty sure he was the most awkward person ever_.

"Whatever you say, man," Jack replied, amusement apparent in his voice, "what'd you want to study in school then? If that's not too personal."

"Oh, well, don't laugh, but when I was younger I wanted to be a police officer," Jack laughed anyways and Hiccup shot him a quick glare before continuing, "but now I think I want to go into engineering, maybe do something with art on the side."

"I knew you were a nerd!" Jack exclaimed, "but really, that's pretty cool. I'm almost done with my first semester and I still don't know what I'm doing. I'm not smart enough to be an engineer so that's out."

"I guess you've only had like three years to find out, that'd be hard I suppose."

"Exactly! It's like, I barely know who I am, so how am I supposed to figure out who I'm supposed to be and what to do with the rest of my life."

Hiccup was a bit amazed with the amount of energy Jack had. He was sitting up straighter, nearly bouncing in his seat, and staring at Hiccup with wide, expectant eyes. Hiccup wasn't sure if he was expecting answers, or he had just pondered the subject so extensively he was simply excited to let it out.

"You don't have any idea what you like to do at all?" Hiccup questioned.

"Not really. I mean, I like kids so maybe I could do something with that. I dunno, I would probably suck as a teacher, not that it sounds like much fun to be stuck in a school the rest of my life. Day care doesn't exactly pay well, and like I said, I'm not really smart enough to go into pediatrics."

"Maybe you could be the guy who drives the ice cream truck around," Hiccup shrugged, not having any useful advice to give.

"Oh man, I love the ice cream truck!" Jack seemed genuinely ecstatic about the idea, "that would be the perfect job. I should just quite college and do that know, then I could die happy. I would be better than the guy now. He's only out for like one hour and only in the summer, it's terrible."

"I don't think most people get ice cream in the winter, it's a bit cold for that."

"It's never too cold for ice cream, I should cut your tongue out for your offensive language. Wash your mouth with soap sir!" Jack wagged his finger at Hiccup who swatted it out of the way, "and in an ice cream parlor no less, have you no decency?"

"I must have left that the same place I left my leg."

Hiccup and Jack talked for a bit longer, throwing quips back and forth until it turned into a sort of game. Hiccup usually won, being just a bit quicker and cleverer of tongue. Jack took it all good naturedly and returned it almost in full. In all, Hiccup found Jack surprisingly easy to talk to, in a way he had never found any of his peers before. It was nice also, as much as he loved Toothless and wouldn't trade him for the world, to have someone who could respond. He felt a bit guilty thinking it, but although Toothless and him communicated fairly well considering, it was nice to have an actual conversation.

Enjoying himself or not, however, Hiccup began to notice the darkening sky outside the window. Though he didn't expect Toothless back quite so soon, he was a little apprehensive he would return to the center and find Hiccup wasn't there. He didn't want to worry Toothless like that. Jack must have noticed his hesitation, because he offered to drive Hiccup back.

"I really can walk back on my own, it's fine," Hiccup assured him, hoping he didn't seem rude for wanting to leave.

"Aster is never going to go for that. He'll just insist he takes you back. If I drive, we don't bother him and we're only out for half the time," Jack pulled a set of keys from his pocket and shook them a bit in front of Hiccup, as though they were some prize.

"If it's not a problem then, but you really don't have to," Hiccup relented, not wanting to bother Aster more than he had to.

"Nope," Jack popped the 'p' sound a bit in emphasis, "not a problem at all. Come on, I'll just tell North we're off."

"Thanks," Hiccup hurried to try and follow, having a bit of trouble standing up quickly with the crutches. When they got out to the customer area North was the first to notice them. He was sitting at the table with Aster and a much smaller man with dirty blond hair.

"Jack, Hiccup, what brings you out here?" North boomed. The small man looked confused, he turned to Aster with a loose fist over his chest and made a motion with his body that Hiccup assumed was imitating a hiccup. Aster then smirked and responded with hand gestures that Hiccup realized were sign language. He didn't have a chance to ponder this, however, as Jack responded to North.

"Since you guys seem busy, I thought I'd just drive Hiccup back," Jack said, brandishing the keys.

"You sure?" Aster asked, seeming hesitant. "I can walk 'im back."

"Yeah, driving would be faster anyways, and I'd hate to tear away anyone's time with Sandy," Jack winked at the shorter man who gave a silent laugh in return. Hiccup wondered whether the man was deaf or just mute like Toothless. Come to think of it, North brought him up after he mentioned Toothless was mute, so maybe that was it. He couldn't help but wonder how much easier it would be for them if he and Toothless learned sign language.

"Ya look confused, fishbone," Aster chuckled, "doesn't yer friend need to sign to communicate?"

"No, or, at least, he could but he can't. I mean, neither of us knows any sign language," Hiccup said, shuffling one of the crutches. The new man gave Hiccup a piteous look and signed to Aster who translated.

"He says that's a shame and he couldn't imagine not being able to communicate at all."

"It's not so bad," Hiccup replied, not sure which one of them to address so he settled on looking back and forth between them, "we get by."

The man signed more and once again, Aster related the information.

"He-his name is Sandy by the way, didn't even get the bloody introductions in," Aster said and the man looked a bit sheepish, rubbing his palm in a circle against his collar bone in a sign Hiccup didn't understand, "anyways, he says he has a sign language book or two you could borrow it you wanted."

"No, you all have done enough, really," Hiccup said quickly, though could not deny he was actually hoping they would convince him otherwise.

"It's not like he needs it," Aster jerked his chin towards Sandy. "They're left over from trying to teach North, which was a complete disaster by the way."

"Heh, you are lucky I speak English friend," North chuckled.

"I don't know if lucky is the word fer it," Aster muttered, "anyway, if you promise to return them, they're all yours."

"I- are you sure?" Hiccup asked, biting his lip a little. Sandy nodded enthusiastically, his hands moving quickly and deftly.

"Anything to help a kindred spirit," Aster translated.

"Thanks, that's very kind," Hiccup said, flustered.

"Don't worry about it," Aster waved his hand as though to wave away any complaints, "now, let Jack drive you back, and I'll bring them in to the center next week."

Hiccup followed Jack out and into the car, buckling into the passenger's seat. The ride back to the center was uneventful other than a bit of trouble Hiccup had getting out of the car without falling on his face. The spoke a bit but of nothing of interest and Jack waved goodbye and turned on the music to drive back to the ice cream parlor. He would have gone straight home except North and him took the same car to work.

When he got back to the parlor, the three older men all turned to look at him.

"What's with the stare down?" he asked, "I've been good I swear."

"As much as I'm sure that's a lie," Aster shook his head, "that's not why. I was wondering if Hiccup told you anything about his past."

"A bit, not much, why?"

"His friend left him at the center and while he seems convinced he's coming back, I'm not so sure," Aster said solemnly.

"He just said he didn't fit in at home or something, and vaguely referenced something happening to drive him away. That's it really," Jack responded, quietly. He felt a little guilty sharing Hiccup's story, as sparse as it was, without permission, though he supposed Aster only had his best interest in mind.

"Did he say more about friend?" North questioned.

"Not really, no. Just that they'd been together since he ran away. Kinda got the feeling they left together. You really think he's not coming back?" Jack sat down, having a feeling this may turn into a long talk.

"I don't know, mate. I hope he does, for Hiccup's sake, but apparently he just dropped the kid off at the center and left," Aster sighed. "Did he tell you anything else?"

"I don't think so," Jack pondered, "he mentioned he still wants to go to college. I guess he has all these plans for once he turns eighteen."

"That's vonderful," North boomed. Sandy signed his appreciation as well, smiling lightly.

"Yeah, I guess he even took all his paperwork with him when he left," Jack shrugged, "wants to save up some money and go into engineering."

"He has more plans than you do, Frostbite," Aster snorted.

"More brains too," North added, laughing. Jack groaned and dropped his head to the table.

"Don't remind me," he said. Sandy rolled his eyes and signed to Jack.

He had been practicing some sign language, even signing up for a course next semester (there was no room among the introductory level courses to squeeze it in for the fall), so he managed to catch most of it. Something along the lines of 'you'll be fine' and 'you just need to find what you want to do.' Jack thanked him.

"How bad must it have been for him to choose this life over living at home?" Jack asked suddenly, but very quietly. He was genuinely curious, though the thought made him a bit anxious. He liked Hiccup and was worried now about what would happen to him. He hadn't thought about it much while he was there, being mostly involved in their conversation, but on the way back from Guardian Center, he began to have misgivings. He volunteered there with North sometimes so he knew it was far from the ideal life. As bad as foster care had been, being homeless had to be worse. He had run away a few times, but only for a couple of days and never to the streets. He would find an old abandoned tree house or fort and hide away until he got hungry or bored or someone came looking for him. Usually it was Aster who found him and dragged him back by his ear.

"I don't know, Jack," North looked at him with concerned eyes, "but we can only hope for best."

"Hiccup's a smart kid," Aster added, "he's got a lot of spunk and determination. That's not something that can be said for a lot of people we see at the center. He'll pull himself out of this."

"Yeah, I guess," Jack said, not really convinced but hoping it was true.

"Listen, Jack," North placed a large hand on his shoulder, "I know is hard to watch, but think of everything you went through and you are still here and good."

"Yeah, but I could be right where he is if it wasn't for you," Jack frowned, "the only person he has is that friend and we don't even know if he's coming back."

"That is not true," North said, and now he brought Jack into his chest, hugging him tightly. "He has Aster and you, and even Sandy and I if he needs. There are always people who will help, you just need to believe in them."

North released Jack, who, though he had grown accustomed to North's many shows of affection, seemed embarrassed. His face, porcelain skinned as he was, began to turn dark red as Aster sniggered a bit at his discomfiture.

"Anyways, mate," Aster regained his composure and leaned back in his seat, addressing North, "it really is getting late. I should head back to my flat before the bloody neighbors decide to start their nightly activities." He stood and grabbed his jacket, which he had taken off sometime while Hiccup and Jack were in the back room, "I swear, if they don't stop having sex and ungodly hours, I'm going to start planting smoke bombs in their apartment."

"Just because you can't get laid doesn't mean you should take out your frustrations on everyone else," Jack snickered, ducking behind a chair to avoid the pack of napkins Aster threw. He stuck out his tongue at the man when he missed but was promptly smacked in the

forehead with a plastic spoon. Aster then grumbled and left the building, waving a quick goodbye to Sandy and North while giving Jack the middle finger.

Sandy turned to North and smiled, signing that he had to go as well and that he enjoyed visiting. North, despite the grief they all gave him, knew enough sign language to catch the gist of it. He smiled and clapped the short man on the shoulder, telling him to come visit more often. Once Sandy had grabbed his coat and left the shop, North turned to Jack.

"Well, Phil left half an hour ago, so I guess we lock up and go home now," he suggested. Jack nodded; he was all too ready to get to sleep after a long day of school, work and meeting Hiccup.

"Alright, you start car, I'll be out in minute," North all but pushed Jack out the door. The pair made it home and, yawning before they could even make it in the door, said their goodnights straight away. Jack practically fell into his bed, curling around his pillows and feeling stress melt away. Despite his exhaustion, however, he found it hard to sleep. He thought about Hiccup at Guardian Center, having to sleep on the floor with just a thin blanket, huddled against a mass of strangers. He felt an incredible sense of guilt. Why should Hiccup, and all the other homeless children out there, have to suffer while Jack got to sleep comfortably in his bed? He could easily be in his place, but thanks to North, he had a home and a family, people who believed in him. Hiccup had a pair of crutches and a friend who might not come back. How was that fair at all? Jack sighed. He considered texting some friend from school to occupy his mind, but, not wanting to wake anyone up, he stared at his alarm clock until he fell asleep nearly two hours later.

3. Flynn Rider

Hiccup wouldn't say he was enjoying his time at Guardian Center, but it certainly wasn't as bad as he had expected. He also wasn't expecting to be there as long as he was. It had been two weeks since Toothless had left and Hiccup was starting to get very anxious. Aster had brought him the sign language book as promised, and a sketchbook and pencils as well. Hiccup wasn't sure where Aster got the idea for that, but he made it impossible to refuse. So Hiccup spent most of his time huddled in the corner of the room, either reading from the book or sketching in the notebook quietly. He had managed to learn a bunch of basic signs, 'my name is H-I-C-C-U-P,' 'please,' 'thank you,' 'I don't understand,' the easy first few any introductory language course studies the first few weeks. He filled up quite a few pages of the sketchbook as well. He sketched out portraits of people in the shelter, including a few of Aster and North and other volunteers. He had started a few of Toothless from memory, but got angry before he could finish any of them. Other pages were full of designs and blueprints for different inventions. A small majority of them were designs of prosthetic legs, both for him and Toothless. Sometimes he would, in the corners of the pages when he wasn't in the mood for anything else, sketch out dragons. They would be flying across the page, or breathing fire onto one of the invention blueprints.

Sitting there though, in the corner with the crutches beside him, he was growing more and more miserable. Aster came in often and would

chat with him a while before going off to do other things and North, the kind, loud man from the ice cream parlor, came two or three times a week. Jack and Sandy each came twice as well. Still, he was lonely. For nearly a year, it had been him and Toothless, best friends, like brothers, but now— Well, now Hiccup was on his own. With each passing day, he grew angrier with Toothless for leaving him, but at the same time, more and more anxious for his return. After the first week, he began to worry something had happened to him. He was hurt, or sent to jail, or something else equally as terrible. It wasn't so bad, during the day, when he could sit and sketch or talk with volunteers or even the odd patron of the center, but at night he found it hard to sleep. He didn't realize how difficult it would be to sleep without Toothless at his side. They usually huddled together, at first for warmth and then for comfort. Neither found it strange, there was nothing embarrassing about it, they were simply very close. Hiccup missed the warmth of Toothless's body next to him while he slept. Without it, he felt cold and exposed, alone in the crowded center.

He didn't share his worries, but Aster and the others seemed to notice anyways. Aster gave him not so subtle pitying looks while Sandy and North patted his shoulder, one with more vigor than the other. Jack was far less delicate about it.

"What's eating you?" he asked on his third visit to the center. He was serving food while Hiccup, having already eaten, was sitting next to him and doodling a large black dragon. The beast was fierce, eye's ablaze, but it was being restrained by a lot of crudely drawn Vikings with large beards and spiked helmets.

"I don't know what you mean," Hiccup muttered, none too convincingly. Jack just quirked an eyebrow and looked at him, not missing a beat while serving patrons.

"I know we've only met, like, four times, but it's not that hard to tell you're in a funk," Jack said, turning back to the pot of soup in front of him so he didn't spill.

"Well I am kind of in a homeless shelter eating bad soup surrounded by people who smell really bad," Hiccup retorted. Unfortunately, the man currently being served did not take kindly to the sentiment.

"You don't exactly smell like daisies either, kid," he spat, taking a piece of bread and leaving in a huff. Jack snickered.

"Thanks," Hiccup responded sarcastically, despite the man's back being turned, "I really needed to be reminded of that."

"Well he's not wrong," Jack shrugged, still smirking at Hiccup's woes. Hiccup rolled his eyes in response then returned to his sketchbook. He turned the page and began to draw out a caricature of Jack. It was the first time he had tried drawing the other boy, having not been at the center often, and he found it rather difficult to capture his likeness. There was a certain mischievous twinkle to his eye and quirk in his lips that Hiccup couldn't seem to put onto paper. The sketch turned into something more cartoony until he rendered Jack on the page looking like an imp, pointed ears and all.

"Is that me?" Jack asked, looking over Hiccup's shoulder, "what did you do to me?"

"This is what you look like," Hiccup responded as he darkened the lines on a pointed nose.

"No way!" Jack exclaimed, "This is slander!"

"Slander is an oral denouncement. This is in no way slander," Hiccup said dryly, "besides, slander is by definition, false."

"I demand a redo," Jack announced, pointing the ladle at Hiccup. A scraggly looking woman on the other side of the counter cleared her throat loudly and held out her bowl, not looking pleased with Jack.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Frost, it'll turn out the same."

"I think it's a pretty accurate sketch," Aster said behind Hiccup, looking over his shoulder. The sudden appearance make Hiccup jump and nearly drop the sketch book into a pot of soup.

"You're going to give me a heart attack," Hiccup said, placing his hand over his racing heart and taking a few calming breaths.

"Sorry 'bout that," Aster chuckled and bent down to heave a new pot onto the counter, "you keeping Jack out of trouble?"

"I'm afraid there's little I can do on that front," Hiccup reported.

"Hey! I haven't even done anything," Jack whined, "I've been good, I swear."

"Sure you have," Aster nodded to Jack, but then shook his head at Hiccup mouthing 'no.' Hiccup chuckled.

"Anyhow," Aster continued, "Flynn's back."

"Flynn Rider? Yes!" Jack pumped his fist in the air, "Flynn's like the life of the homeless party."

"No, Jack, Flynn is second most irritating person on the planet second only to you," Aster said, whacking Jack on the back of his head, "I was going to tell you to keep an eye on him, but on second thought, just stay away from him."

"You're no fun," Jack pouted dramatically.

"Whatever you say," Aster rolled his eyes, "don't cause trouble and don't let him steal anything," he finished in parting, leaving the boys alone again. Once he was fully out of view, Jack turned to Hiccup with a wicked smile.

"Want to go meet Flynn?" he said deviously.

"No," Hiccup responded flatly. Jack groaned and pouted and begged until eventually Hiccup agreed, if only to keep an eye on the two. Jack nearly threw off his apron, yelling for another volunteer to take over, and tossed the crutches to Hiccup.

"Come on, you're so slow!" he poked the boy's side.

"We'll sorry, we don't all have two legs."

"That's no excuse, come on," he drew out the last syllable, practically whining for Hiccup to hurry up. In return, Hiccup was sure to take his time situating himself on the crutches, drawing out movements and actions that could have been quick. Finally he decided Jack had suffered enough and went to follow him through the crowd to the other side of the room where there was a circle of people. It was the usual bunch, some Hiccup had grown to recognize some he hadn't, and one girl that looked out of place. Hiccup figured she was a volunteer, her clothes were nice and her hair was freshly washed. Her hair on its own was a wonder to look at. Hiccup had never seen someone with hair so long or such a beautiful golden color, it was practically glowing in the shabby room. The man standing next to her was handsome to say the least, great hair and a devilish smile.

"Jack!" the man exclaimed rushing over to noogie the boy, "how you been?"

"Not bad," Jack said, squirming out of his grip and punching him lightly on the shoulder, "you?"

"Well, as you can see, I have a guest," Flynn gestured to the girl, who peered at Jack nervously, "she wanted to see the world, so I thought I'd take her to a nice place like this, show her around."

"Seriously? You took a girl to a soup kitchen for a first date?" Jack laughed then turned to the girl, "you could do better."

"It not a date!"

"We're not on a date!"

They spoke in unison, looking at each other then back at Jack.

"Flynn's taking me to see the lantern memorial," the girl smiled, wide and pure, "I've always wanted to go but mother never lets me."

"What's the lantern memorial?" Hiccup asked, curiously.

"It's this big memorial festival the Corona's put on. They're daughter went missing when she was a baby and they're pretty rich, so every year they put on this memorial slash fundraiser event. They set a bunch of floating lanterns into the sky, it's a really amazing sight. I guess they still have hope she'll come back one day," Jack explained.

"Load of bologna," one of the other patrons snorted, a large, angry looking man.

"I think it's wonderful," the girl twirled in her spot, her hair flowing around her, and Hiccup found himself a bit taken with the rawness of her emotions. She was so unguarded that her feelings just

kind of poured out of her.

"They're just setting themselves up for heart break," the angry man scoffed back, "this here, this is the real world."

"Haven't you ever had a dream?" she inquired, leaning towards him with big, doe like eyes. "Something you wished for so hard, you would have given anything to make it come true?"

"I-" he stuttered, his face softening, "yeah, uh, I had a dream once. I was going to be a pianist, play on stage in front of millions, but I got this numb hand and, you know, a police record."

"Oh, don't give up! I'm sure you're very good," she clasped her hands in front of her, nodded her head. There was a murmur throughout the crowd, mostly in snorts of disbelief. At the sound, the girl placed her hands on her hips and peered out at them. "How dare you mock his dreams, haven't you all got something you wish for?"

There was a hushed silence before someone called out.

"I want to fall in love!"

And then, as though flood gates had been opened, everyone began to share their hopes and dreams, becoming very excited in the process. Hiccup was surprised to find that many of them were fairly cozy and emotional, underneath the hardened exterior. After a while, the group was prodding Jack to tell his dreams.

"Who me?" he asked, "I guess I want to get my memories back," he tapped his temple twice with his index finger. Then he turned to Hiccup and the entire crowd's gaze seemed to follow. Hiccup found himself very much put on the spot. He looked between Jack, the crowd, and the girl's expectant gaze before sighing, relenting.

"I want to go to college," he said, hesitantly, "so I can study engineering and make enough to find a place to live with my friend."

Hiccup tried to avoid everyone's gaze then, embarrassed about sharing his aspirations, though the slight cheer through the crowd was inspiring. He ended up looking at the handsome man who was with the girl, being the only one not looking at him. This, however, was taken as a prompt for him to share next, which he vehemently refused to do.

"No, no," he said, holding his hands up, "I don't do the whole touchy-feely share your dreams thing."

The crowd pushed him around a bit, quite roughly, until he conc-eded.

"Alright," he gave in, "alright, I give. I've got a dream too. I just want to be rich and live alone somewhere. Happy?"

His dream didn't get quite the cheers the others did, mostly grumbles and scoffs, but the girl seemed pleased none-the-less.

"I want to see the floating lights," she piped up, satisfied that everyone else had shared already, "I've watched them all my life from

the windows but I've never gotten to see them up close. They're just so beautiful."

She got the loudest cheer of all, some people even went up to hug her, which she graciously accepted. Jack looked on and elbowed the handsome man in the side.

"She's cute," he said, wagging his eyebrows.

"She's trouble," he said blandly. Jack laughed.

"I have someone for you to meet," Jack continued, dragging the man over to Hiccup.

"Flynn, this is Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. Hiccup, this is Flynn Rider."

"Nice to meet you," Hiccup held his hand out, balancing a crutch under his arm.

"Yeah, pleasure," Flynn took his hand, but didn't show any actual interest in the boy, which Hiccup was fairly used to.

"So Jack," he continued, "anything interesting going on? Anyone fighting? Stolen anything? Anything?"

"Not that I know of. I haven't been here a lot since I started school; I've been so busy I haven't had time to volunteer. Why?"

"No reason, just curious," Flynn said, stroking his goatee. Hiccup wasn't convinced, and with what Aster had been saying earlier, he was very suspicious.

"Just don't cause too much trouble," Jack apparently wasn't convinced either, "Aster's just dying to get me in trouble."

"Can't promise anything."

"So, you gonna introduce us to your 'friend,'" Jack used his fingers to make quotation marks when he said friend. Flynn groaned but brought the boys over to where the girl was talking animatedly with a group of people. She smiled when Flynn approached and turned to face them, practically jumping on the balls of her feet.

"Rapunzel, meet Jack and- what was it?"

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III"

"Seriously? Alright, meet Jack and Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. Guys, meet Rapunzel."

"Hi! It's nice to meet you; I hope we can be friends," shook their hands vigorously, smiling all the while. She turned to Jack, "You said you lost your memories? That's terrible, what happened?"

"Well, you know, I don't really remember," Jack laughed awkwardly, "kind of goes with the amnesia."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I should have realized," she gasped, covering her mouth with her hands.

"No, it's fine. It doesn't bother me," Jack said, stuffing his hands into the pocket of his sweatshirt. Hiccup honestly wasn't sure whether it really didn't bother him, or he was just being polite. He figured it just didn't bother him, Jack seemed to take things as they came and roll with the punches.

They talked for a while, the crowd having finally dispersed. Jack and Hiccup finding they both rather liked Rapunzel. She laughed at Jack's bad jokes and fawned over Hiccup's sketch book. There was such an innocence in her that, though they were enjoying her company, they had a creeping feeling in their gut. She seemed to be too fresh and hopeful to be among this shabby crowd, full of people whose lives had turned sour in one way or another.

After a while, Flynn pulled Jack away, leaving Hiccup and Rapunzel to talk. Rapunzel was trying to convince Hiccup to draw a portrait of her, Hiccup was refusing out of modesty, but honestly wanted to try and capture some of her light on paper.

"Listen, Jack," Flynn started when they were out of earshot, "I may need some help."

"What? Need a wing man? No problem I've-" Jack was cut off by Flynn's hand covering his mouth.

"No," he hissed, "I may be in just a teensy bit of trouble. If the cops show up here, I need you to throw them off my trail."

"What? Seriously?" Jack looked surprised, "what the hell did you do?"

"Nothing serious, relax. I just maybe stole something, nothing important. But the cops are after my and so are my 'partners,' so could you just throw me a bone here?"

"Flynn, if North or Aster find out I had anything to do with this, I'll be dead for sure!"

"Then don't let them find out. I'm not asking you to commit a crime, just keep quiet and direct them in the _other_ direction."

"Fine, I'll do it. But if I find out this is bigger than you're telling me, I swear I'll dump you in a lake," Jack poked Flynn's chest, "and you owe me big time for this."

"Yeah sure, just as long as I don't end up in the slammer," Flynn said dismissively, looking out the large front window, "though I may have to call in this favor sooner than expected."

Sure enough, two men in uniform were outside the center looking at the sign outside. Flynn dashed away and grabbed Rapunzel's arm usher her quickly out the back door, leaving a very confused Hiccup behind.

"What was that about?" Hiccup asked when Jack walked over to him.

"Long story, I can't explain right now," Jack said, looking nervous. "Listen, I promise I'll tell you later, but follow my lead,

okay?"

Before Hiccup could respond, the officer's entered the building and Jack went up to greet them.

"Good afternoon, officers," he said, politely. This was Hiccup's first clue something wasn't right and something told him he should just run now. "Can I help you with anything?"

"You a volunteer?" one asked, looking down his broad nose at Jack.

"Yes sir," Jack nodded.

"We're going to have to ask around the place. We're looking for a 'Flynn Rider,' you seen 'im?" he held out an artist's rendition of Flynn, rendered very well except for one little feature. There, on the middle of his face, was a round, bulbous nose, not at all like his real one.

"Flynn? I know Flynn," Jack nodded, "haven't seen him in a while though. Hey folks," Jack turned to the crowd, winking at them as soon as his back was to the officers, "you know Flynn Rider?"

There was a course of yes's and groans, even some outbursts of "I hate that lousy bum," or "rotten scoundrel."

"He's popular around here," Jack chuckled to the officer then addressed the crowd again, "anyone seen him around?"

Everyone shook their heads in the negative, muttering no's and looking around as though they might see him amongst them.

"Guess not, sorry officers," Jack said, frowning, "you're welcome to ask around though."

"No, we'll move on," the officer sighed. "Thank you for your help, lad, keep it up."

Jack nodded and opened the door for them to leave. Once they were out, Jack heaved a giant sigh, looking very relieved. Hiccup, who had remained silent until then, went up to Jack and hissed,

"What was that about?"

"Flynn was in a little trouble," Jack said hurriedly, leaning against the window and looking back to make sure the officer's were on their way. "He stole something or other and needed help. Please don't tell Bunny," he begged.

"Don't tell me what?" Oh, of course Aster was already there, perfect, "that you just lied to two police officers to protect some rotten thief? What's going on Jack? You could get in real trouble here."

"Flynn needed help. Isn't that what you say I should do, help people? He's a good guy, I promise, and it wasn't anything bad, and I didn't want the girl with him to get in trouble either. Please don't tell North!" Jack pleaded, clasping his hands in front of him.

"Don't tell North!? Jack, you just lied to the police and you think I won't tell North?" Aster raked his fingers through his hair, exasperated, "Flynn deserves what he gets. He breaks the law, he pays the consequences."

"I thought everyone deserved a second chance," Jack huffed.

"Flynn's out of second chances, Jack, he's used them all up. All he ever causes is trouble," Aster was yelling now, causing a crowd to gather. The volunteers tried to disperse everyone and get to the center, but the group was dense and rowdy.

"So what? We should just send him to the dogs? So he stole a few things, it's not like people can't do with a little less. We all sleep fat and happy in our beds at night but Flynn and everyone here has to sleep on this filthy floor. How is that fair?"

Jack practically screamed back, forgetting where he was. His outburst seemed to surprise Aster as he drew back in surprise.

"Jack," he said, stunned. "Jack, look, I won't tell North, but this has to stop. Just, don't talk with Flynn again, please?"

"I'm not going to just--"

"Jack! Please."

"Fine, whatever, I'll just ignore everything you guys ever told me and let Flynn rot," Jack stormed out of the building, the crowd parting to let him through, and slammed the door shut behind him. Aster sat down, pinching the bridge of his nose and looking exhausted.

"Fuck," he muttered, kicking an empty Styrofoam bowl on the ground. Hiccup stared, at a loss for what to do. Eventually he decided it would be awkward to just turn and walk away so he sat next to Aster, but could not think of anything to say. Thankfully, Aster spoke first.

"Sorry, Hiccup," he said, sighing, "that was uncalled for."

"No, it's okay, I just don't think what Jack did was that bad." Hiccup wanted to kick himself as soon as he said it, he wanted to comfort Aster, not make it worse. He rushed to try and explain himself. "I mean, it's just kind of different for us. When it's steal or starve, stealing doesn't look so back. Maybe Flynn got carried away, but he's probably just trying to look after himself."

Aster gave him a long thoughtful look, perching his chin on interlaced fingers. "You ever stolen anything, Hiccup?" he asked after several moments.

"I'm going to not answer that one," Hiccup laughed nervously. He had stolen little things before, out of necessity.

"You are far too wise for someone your age, you know that?" Aster smirked for a moment before it turned into a grimace. "I just wish Jack would listen to what I say once in a while."

"I'm not supposed to tell you this," Hiccup chewed on his lip, "but

Jack told me he really looked up to you. Said he wouldn't be where he is today without you. I think he just has survivor's guilt."

This earned him a questioning glance, so Hiccup explained.

"Like, he sees all of us down here and thinks that maybe this was where he was supposed to end up. But for whatever reason, he was saved while we're all still stuck here. Like when the sole survivor of a plane crash wonders why he lived when everyone else died."

"That's grim, but I hadn't thought of it like that," Aster nodded. He placed his arm around Hiccup's shoulders and gave him a little squeeze, like an awkward one armed hug. "You're too good a kid for a place like this, Fishbone."

Hiccup was sure his face must have been bright red. His stomach dropped and twisted and he was sure his palms were sweating like never before. He had no idea how to respond to that, but felt horribly embarrassed in the silence so he simply muttered something quickly.

"I don't know about that," he said, nearly tripping over his words. Aster chuckled and ruffled Hiccup's hair, not seeming to have noticed the boy's discomfort.

"You really are," Aster repeated, a little softer this time. He smiled and got to his feet with a grunt. "Well, keep out of trouble. I've had enough excitement for one day so I'll be heading back before it gets too late."

"Bye, Aster," Hiccup said, still blushing.

"See ya, Fishbone."

4. Chapter 4

A/N: First of all, I wanted to thank everyone who reviewed. I couldn't keep the smile off my face reading them :)

DF-chan:

1. Don't worry, Toothless will be back soon and he has a good reason!

2. That was my plan :) I wanted to try and keep that feel of the Snuggly Duckling scene without the actual musical aspect. I'm glad that came across well then.

3. Isn't adorable? I can't ever really see it as a mutual thing, and Aster is older so it wouldn't work practically, but I really like the idea of Hiccup having a crush on him. I don't know what it is.

4. Yes, I will include more of the big four, so that will include Merida at some point, and Rapunzel will make further appearances, but it will mostly stick with just those four universes.

5. Thank you very much! I had most of the beginning few chapters written up beforehand though, so the updates will most likely slow

down considerably now. Though I'm also just about done with work for the summer so I'll have more time in the coming month.

JMarieAllenPoe

Thank you very much! I appreciate it :)

Snow Kiddie Cat

Dread? I don't understand. But I'm glad you like it!

* * *

><p>Aster didn't come into the center the next day, nor did Jack. Sandy showed up for a while and congratulated Hiccup on his progress with sign language before getting to work. North came in for a bit the following day but had little time to spare. The next few days as well, Hiccup found himself mostly without company. The other patrons of the center didn't pay him much mind, nor did the other volunteers. The closest he got to a real conversation came either from pity for his leg, or anger from him messing something up. He always seemed to find a way to break things, no matter how careful he tried to be. In fact, it seemed that the more cautious he was, the more important the outcome, the more he managed to screw it up.<p>

North came again after five days and informed him that Aster had to travel for a work related emergency, and Sandy was visiting family, but that there was someone he wanted him to meet. There was a short woman with him. Her hair was dyed in streaks of blue, green, and yellow, seeming to shimmer even in the dull lighting. She had violet eyes (Hiccup had heard it was possible to have them naturally and wondered if this was the case with her) and the most brilliant smile he had ever seen. The woman stuck out her hand for Hiccup, who took it, and gave him a vigorous shake.

"Hi," she said with a lively voice, "I've heard mention of you, Hiccup. My name is Ana, though around here they call me Tooth."

"Ana is a dentist," North explained, "every once in while, she will come in and give free examinations. Performs any necessary operations, no charge."

"There is nothing more important than a healthy mouth!" The sprightly woman quickly approached Hiccup and without so much as warning him, had her fingers in his mouth. Hiccup was very aware he was in fairly desperate need of braces, and that he hadn't truly brushed or flossed his teeth in some time, so he wasn't altogether happy with the turn of events.

"Well it's not great," the woman hummed, "you've got a bit of a gap and a few crooked teeth. Nothing braces couldn't fix, but no real problem there. Other than that, though, you're mostly good. No cavities but you could use a good cleaning." She handed him a toothbrush she pulled out of her pocket with a very small tube of toothpaste.

"Uh," Hiccup stumbled over what to say in this particular occasion, though he finally settled on simply thanking her, "thanks, I guess, for that."

"Not a problem," she smiled, seeming very pleased, "it's what I do."

She left promptly afterwards, without even a farewell. North chuckled and explained that she was always like this, and she would often become a bit too excited about her job. Better that than hating it though, Hiccup supposed. She had apparently come with assistants, as a few lines were forming for her, a few other girls, and one boy with a Spanish accent.

North squeezed Hiccup's shoulder and informed him Jack and Phil would be coming in later, after closing the ice cream parlor early for the day (apparently the machine had broken down and was in need of repair) then went about his business helping Ana. Hiccup was glad to hear that Jack was coming. The other boy generally ditched most of his responsibilities and opted instead to hang out with Hiccup. It was welcome company and it would be nice to have someone to talk to after the last few days.

While he was waiting for Jack to arrive (impatiently, though he would not admit it aloud), he decided to sketch out the bright woman who had molested his teeth. She was very difficult to pin down, as she seemed to flit about the entire room, but he found her face very expressive. She wore her emotions on her sleeve, thought not quite in the innocent, naïve way Rapunzel had a few days earlier. This woman had more spunk to her, a spark that simply exuded from her very pores. It was fun to watch, and Hiccup tried imagining her inner monologue as he watched the myriad of expressions pass across her face at lightning speed. He had entirely forgotten about Jack until said boy was leaning over his sketchbook, letting out a low, impressed whistle.

"Wow," he said as Hiccup let out a rather embarrassing squeak, nearly jumping out of his skin, "that looks just like Tooth. That's amazing; you can practically see how her teeth literally glow."

"Uh, thanks, I just liked how vivid her emotions are on her face, soâ€¦" Hiccup flushed.

"Like her face, huh?" Jack gave him a wicked grin and wagged his eyebrows. Hiccup groaned and hid his face in his hands. Often times, when he said he liked something about someone they would get the wrong idea. He meant it in a purely artistic sense for the most part, though most didn't seem to understand that.

"No. I'm not, I mean, I don't like girls, or I do, I'm not a jerk, I just don't _like girls_." It was very liberating to say out loud, though Hiccup almost didn't go through with it. Toothless and the other 'dragons' of course knew, but he had never told anyone at home besides his father and that hadn't gone over well. But that was part of why he had left, so he would not have to pretend to be something he was not, so he decided if he was going to live this life, he was going to live it without regrets. Luckily Jack didn't seem to be judging him, he would not have liked to lose his newâ€¦ friend? He supposed they were friends at this point, though certainly not close ones.

"Yeah?" Jack, after a moment of surprise, began to grin again, "so Flynn's more your type, huh?"

Hiccup groaned again.

"Yeah, Jack, I just love the type who has the cops on their tail the first time we meet. How will I ever resist him," Hiccup commented dryly.

"Hey, weren't you the one saying the 'live on the street,' 'rebel without a cause' type was sexy? I'm just saying," Jack plopped himself beside Hiccup and nudged him with his elbow playfully.

"Nope, that only works for me," Hiccup informed him, "Flynn's a little too full of himself to be of any real interest."

"But you have to admit he's attractive."

"If you mean he has a nice jaw line and great hair, then yes," Hiccup conceded, then added, after a moment's thought, "a nice ass too."

Jack laughed, patting Hiccup's back as he did.

"You should see him give the smolder, it's great. But come one then, you've got to like someone. Tell me," Jack whined his last words.

"Yeah sure-" Hiccup said and Jack brightened "-and then we'll paint each other's nails and have a pillow fight."

Jack's face fell and he pouted for a few minutes before smiling devilishly. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a bottle of what Hiccup thought could only be nail polish.

"Why would you even-that's kind of scary actually-but why would you even have that?" Hiccup asked, flabbergasted.

"Don't be judgey, Hiccup, it's rude. Men can paint their nails too," as if to demonstrate this, Jack unscrewed the cap of the bottle, "but really, a friend from school left it at my house and I was going to return it later."

Jack then took Hiccup's hand, which he promptly pulled away, looking at Jack as though he had suggested they jump off a building expecting to fly.

"No, Jack, just no. You are not painting my nails, nope," Hiccup shook his head vehemently.

"Come on, it was your idea. After that all we'll have to do is find some pillows and talk about boys," he winked.

Hiccup continued to refuse, but Jack was relentless, so eventually Hiccup found himself sitting in his corner with Jack painting his nails black. Jack was very absorbed in what he was doing, his tongue just slightly poking past his lips in concentration. He was trying very hard to not get any of the color on Hiccup's skin and was mostly succeeding. Hiccup wondered how his life had ever come to this.

"This is hard," Jack admitted, finishing the first hand, "how do girls do it all the time?"

"Girls are mystical and confusing creatures," Hiccup answered sagely, still a bit at a loss for how he ended up doing this.

"Speaking of, except not at all, who is your mystery man?"

"Why do you even want to know," Hiccup scowled, having hoped the topic had been dropped.

"I'm just a really nosey person, I do this to everyone," Jack bit his lip as he tried to wipe away some of the polish that had gotten onto Hiccup's thumb. "Is it that friend of yours, Toothless? Which, hey, we should get him and Tooth in a room together, the river of tooth related puns would be never ending."

"Gods no," Hiccup shook his head, "Toothless is like family; that'd just be weird."

"Then who, someone from home?"

"No, Jack, I don't like anyone right now."

"That's a total lie. You flushed so red when I asked who you liked I thought your freckles would disappear. If it's not someone from home is it someone here?" Hiccup did his best to keep his face straight, but was apparently blushing again as Jack dropped the nail polish brush and pointed at Hiccup exclaiming "Aha!"

"What!? I didn't even say anything," Hiccup looked away, hoping to hide his face.

"You didn't have to," Jack picked up the brush, smearing a glob of spilled paint into the dirty floor without regret, "it's written all over your face. So, someone here, and it can't be Tooth. Oh please tell me it's not North."

"Yes Jack, you've caught me," Hiccup said sarcastically, "I'm in love with North and wanted to one day become your step-mother. I hope you will accept me as part of the family, son."

Jack shuddered.

"That's just weird, ugh," he stuck out his tongue and made a face. Besides, you would make a terrible mother. So, not North, not Sandy either. Then there's Jim, Phil, Sam, Bunny, Mr. Valentine, or-hmmm?"

Hiccup must have given some reaction, as much as he was trying not to, because Jack trailed off his list and smirked. "One of them then?" he looked back down at Hiccup's nails and hummed in thought, "well, I haven't you seen talk with Jim or Sam at all. I'm pretty sure you're terrified of Phil. I won't start on Mr. Valentine. That just leaves Bunny. Oh, Hiccup, not the Kangaroo."

"What? No," Hiccup was doing his best to keep his face neutral, "besides, everyone you listed was too old for me anyhow."

"And that's why your face looks like a tomato, I suppose," Jack

quirked an eyebrow, "Bunny's not that old anyways. I had this little crush on this one post doc at school for a while, it's not that weird. I _am_, however, seriously worried about your taste."

"I hate you," Hiccup said simply, bringing his knees up so he could hide his face in them, "I hate you so much."

"Why?" Jack laughed, pulling the brush away from Hiccup's hand while he moved so he didn't mess up. "Because you have bad taste in men? I can't help you there."

"I do _not_ have bad taste," Hiccup lifted his head, looking petulantly at Jack, "I'll have you know the Australian accent is pretty hot."

"Gross, man, I don't need to think of Bunny as 'hot' _ever_," Jack squinted and shook his head as though he could remove the thought by shaking it out, "but hah! I got you to admit it!"

"All I said was that an accent was an attractive quality," Hiccup evaded.

"Like Flynn's ass?" Jack snorted, finding himself very funny. Hiccup didn't even bother responding to that one so there was silence for few short moments until Jack finished the last nail.

"Done!" he exclaimed, screwing the cap back on the bottle then pocketing it. He then proceeded to pull out another bottle, this one a light shade of blue. He tossed the bottle to Hiccup who caught it carefully, wary of smudging his wet nails against his clothing or skin.

"And I suppose this is a friend's too, hm?" Hiccup peered at Jack suspiciously. Jack just laughed in response.

"Yeah, yeah, I secretly wish to be a magic pony and swim in pools of glitter, just get you job done," Jack held out his hand and Hiccup realized he wanted him to paint his nails as well.

"You are so weird," he said, truly meaning it, but carefully unscrewed the cap anyways. The things his father would say if he could see him now, painting a boy's nails, his own already done. He shuddered to think.

"You love me and you know it," Jack informed him. Hiccup rolled his eyes and repositioned himself, sitting with his legs crossed so he could hold Jack's hand close enough to paint. He had expected it to be harder from the look of intense concentration on Jack's face earlier, but found it wasn't as difficult as he had thought. He finished the first hand much quicker than Jack had with significantly less mess on Jack's skin than his own. When he dropped the first hand and took the other Jack decided to speak up again.

"So was the whole gay thing why you ran away?" he asked, unabashed.

"The whole gay thing? Well that's one way to put it. Thank you for summing my life in one powerful sentence," Hiccup snorted, "but it was part of it, yeah. My dad made it pretty clear he didn't want a gay son."

"Maybe he would have come around eventually," Jack offered, shrugging.

"Maybe," Hiccup sighed, "but like I said, it was just part of it. A lot of things happened and I'd rather not talk about it."

"Yeah, sorry, I'll shut up. We can keep talking about boys though, right? I've always wondered what it was like when girls had sleepovers."

"Jack, we're not fourteen year old girls. We are men; we talk about football and cars."

"Okay then, want to talk about football and cars?"

"Not at all."

Jack laughed and in the process managed to move his hand so that the paint smeared on his knuckle. Hiccup sighed, reminiscent of a parent with a rotten child, and wiped the blue goop with a small chunk of paper torn from his sketchbook. He then continued with the nail, fixing what Jack had messed up. It was then that North came over and stared skeptically down at Jack.

"I see you are very busy, Jack," he commented, his hands on his hips.

"Oh hush North, Hiccup and I are painting our nails and talking about boys. You can't interrupt girl time," Jack commented, making his voice sound higher and spoke very matter-of-factly. Hiccup rolled his eyes.

"Of course not," North shook his head, quite accustomed to Jack's antics. "Where did you even get this?"

"Baby Tooth," Jack said, trying to look up at North without moving his hand, "she always forgets things at the house when she visits."

"And you make fun of my name," Hiccup mumbled. With nicknames like Bunny, Tooth, and Baby Tooth, well, Hiccup wasn't really that bad. North apparently did not hear him because he continued on.

"She would lose head if not attached, yes? Anyway, repairman called. He is coming soon so I have to go to shop. You can walk home?"

"Yeah, sure," Jack nodded, a bit awkwardly considering the angle he had his head tipped so that he could see North without disrupting Hiccup's careful work.

"Good, I will see you there," North patted his head, "make sure he is good Hiccup."

"Yes sir," Hiccup mocked a lazy salute, smiling and Jack's offended look.

"Poka," North said, very much confusing Hiccup, and took his leave. When Jack noticed the puzzled look of his face, he explained.

"Poka is like saying 'see you later,' in Russian."

"That makes sense," Hiccup nodded, "now would you hold still for just, like, two seconds. I can't finish this last one if you keep moving around."

"Well, sorry," he stressed each syllable, "it's hard to sit still for so long."

"Not for normal people," Hiccup put the last stroke of blue onto Jack's pinky and pulled back to admire his work. The color actually worked well for Jack, complimenting his bleached hair and unnaturally blue eyes.

"I don't know what you are trying to infer-
>"imply"<p>

"Whatever, this actually looks really cool," Jack admired his nails, "have you done this before, you didn't get any on my skin?"

"It looks ridiculous," Hiccup lied, he secretly kind of liked the way it looked, "and it's not exactly hard."

"You think too much."

"You don't think enough."

"Touche."

Jack waved his hands around for a while, waiting for the nail polish to dry, and the two boys bantered as per usual. Jack was complaining about biology when 'Tooth' came up to greet them. She heaved a deep breath, held it for a moment, then let it all out as she sat down on a nearby chair.

"I love this," she said, "I really do, but boy does it tire me out."

Jack said something in response, but it was muffled by his hands which he had placed firmly over his mouth.

"What in the world are you doing?" Ana gave the boy a confused look. Jack cautiously removed his hands to speak.

"You always freak out over my teeth and-augh," he could not continue further as Ana had in fact placed her fingers in his mouth to inspect his teeth. It did not, however, stop him from trying, as he made several rather incomprehensible noises that Hiccup believed were supposed to be words.

"Beautiful as always. I see you've been flossing nicely," Ana removed her hands and nodded appreciatively.

"Why," Jack cried, "why every time? I think I'm developing a phobia of the dentist thanks to you."

"Nonsense," Ana pinched his cheek, "dentists are your friends."

"Help me," Jack pleaded to Hiccup.

"No Jack," Hiccup shook his head and pretended to scold the boy, "she's right. The dentist is your friend and if you're good you might just get a sugar free sucker."

Ana very nearly squealed in delight.

"Oh, I like this one," she hugged Hiccup very tightly, surprising him greatly, "he's just too sweet for words."

"I'm sure he appreciates it, but if you squeeze him any tighter we might have to send him to the coroner rather than the dentist," Jack retorted. Ana giggled and released Hiccup, having the tact to at least look embarrassed for her outburst. "Impulse control, Tooth, we've talked about this."

"Oh, we've talked about it but I do believe you were on the other side of that conversation," Ana chided. "Speaking of, when'd you start wearing nail polish?"

"Just now. See, we match," Jack grabbed Hiccup's hand and brandished his own for Tooth to see.

"I like it," Tooth smiled, inspecting the nails.

"Speaking of, is Baby Tooth here?" Jack asked and Hiccup managed to free his hand. "I had the nail polish 'cause she left it at our place."

"Nope, but she's coming in to shadow me tomorrow. I can pass it along if you want."

"Yeah, that'd be awesome. Thanks Tooth," Jack pulled out the pale blue and black nail polish bottles as well as a bright yellow and neon green, handing them all over to Ana.

"No problem," Tooth tucked the bottles into her bag, "I should get going though. I'm PÃ©rez's ride today and he needs to get back. I'll see you this weekend Jack?"

"No, actually, sorry. North didn't tell me he invited you guys until yesterday and I already made plans to work on a school project," Jack shrugged.

"That's too bad. You'll have to stop by the office sometime and I'll treat you to coffee."

Jack promised he would stop by soon and Ana said her goodbyes. The lively woman then gathered her group of helpers and made her way out of the building. When they were gone Jack dropped his head back and groaned.

"Lied through my teeth," he said, "I don't have a project to do; I only told them that because Aster's still being an asshole and I didn't want to deal with him all evening."

"Why can't you keep your secrets to yourself?" Hiccup covered his ears and kicked Jack's foot. "I don't need to hear about your troubles. I'm not your therapist."

"No kidding. You'd make a terrible therapist," Jack threw his arm around Hiccup's neck and pulled him into a headlock. Hiccup struggled to escape the hold but Jack was stronger than him. Eventually Hiccup gave up and went limp in the hold.

"Why haven't you two made up yet, anyways," Hiccup said once Jack had finished laughing. Jack released Hiccup from his hold and pulled away frowning.

"Because he's acting like a dick," he scoffed. "He spouts all this shit about not judging people and helping those less fortunate than us but once it's no longer convenient, he throws it all out the window. Like I thought all this shit meant something, but I guess it's just whatever helps you sleep better at night thinking you did some fucking good deed."

"Jack," Hiccup began to fidget. He had always been terrible with emotional talks, always messing them up. He took a breath then started again, "Jack I don't think that's what this is for Aster. Imagine you had someone you had to take care of--"

"I don't need Aster to take--"

"Yeah, you're a big boy, I get it, but he doesn't see it that way. Just try and think, there was someone you wanted to protect. If you thought they were getting in with a bad crowd and lying to the police, what would you do?"

"Flynn's not a 'bad crowd' though. He steals shit sometimes, but it's not like anyone will give him a job, what else is he supposed to do? I should have figured you'd side with Aster on that thoughâ€|"

Jack gave Hiccup a weak smile with a little sardonic chuckle.

"I didn't say that; that's not what I meant," Hiccup rushed to explain, "I was just trying to think how he was seeing it. I don't think Flynn's a bad guy. It'd be kind of hypocritical of me to judge him just for stealing a few things."

"You're kidding!" Jack stared at Hiccup with a gaping mouth, "there is no way you've ever stolen anything in your life!"

"No, I mean, yeah I have, but that'sâ€|" Hiccup trailed off. He shrugged and began to scratch at his arm, avoiding eye contact.

"Hey relax, it's no big deal. You do what you have to get by. I'm not going to judge you," Jack patted Hiccup's shoulder, a bit awkwardly. "You're not going to cry are you?"

"No," Hiccup pushed his hand away and made a face, "I'm not going to cry, jackass."

"So," Jack drawled, "what do you think I should do then?"

"I don't know; I told you I'm not your therapist," Hiccup crossed his arms sternly, but Jack looked so disappointed he caved in a matter of moments, "alright look, I don't know Flynn so I can't tell you whether or not you should avoid him. But what has Flynn ever done for you compared to everything Aster's done? You're lucky to have him, so

you shouldn't just throw all that away."

"I know all that," Jack dropped his head onto his knee and let out a puff of air. After a second he turned his head to the side, resting his cheek on his knee. "I'm not planning on cutting him out of my life or anything, I just want him to get off his high horse for a minute and try and see things my way."

"Well, sorry, that's all I've got. I don't know what to tell you," Hiccup scoffed, settling back against the wall. Jack frowned.

"Why'd you run away?" Jack asked again, out of the blue.

"We already went over this. 'The whole gay thing,' remember?"

"And you said that was only part of it. What happened?"

Hiccup stared at Jack for several moments before stating, very bluntly, "I killed a man." He then settled himself back against the wall of his corner as though that was all that needed to be said.

"If you don't want to talk about it, you could just say so," Jack snorted in amusement.

"Yeah, but that'd be the easy way," Hiccup smirked, but without his usually sassy attitude. It was a tired gesture, half hearted at best.

"Does it hurt?" Jack asked, leaving Hiccup very confused for a moment until he realized he had been massaging his leg, just above the stump.

"Not anymore," he answered, "most of the time I can't feel anything, but sometimes there are phantom pains."

"Like the ghost of your leg is coming back to haunt you?" Jack was proud to say the comment brought out a smile in the younger boy.

"That's a terrifying thought," Hiccup laughed, eyeing the missing limb suspiciously.

"But can you imagine? A ghost leg, just hopping around, haunting you," Jack mimicked hopping with his hand and made eerie ghost noises. Hiccup covered his ears.

"If I have nightmares tonight, I'm blaming you."

"_I_ might have nightmares tonight. That's horrifying," Jack shuddered. "What do they even do with amputated limbs?"

"Well I have mine stuffed on display but usually they incinerate them."

"It's becoming harder for me to tell whether you're joking or you really do have a leg just sitting around somewhere."

Hiccup was about to respond but there was a loud beep from Jack's pocket. He apologized and pulled out a phone, tapping the screen

once.

"It's North," he explained before holding it to his ear.

"Hey, what's up?... Yeahâ€|yeah sureâ€|okay, give me like fifteen minutesâ€|you too, see ya."

Jack hung up and offered Hiccup a small smile and a shrug.

"North needs some help so I've got to head out, but I'm planning on stopping by on Friday, so I'll see you then I guess," Jack gathered his stuff and waved goodbye, leaving Hiccup alone in his corner once again. He sighed and picked up his sketch book once again. He opened to an empty page and paused when he saw his black nails contrast against the white. He frowned. He had never really paid any mind to his nails before, but now they were hard not to notice. The black complimented the paleness of his hands and the flush of freckles such that he almost wanted to reproduce it with paints. But he was ashamed of it as well. There was something inherently feminine about painted nails. All his life he was called weak and small and girly; even the girls were tougher than him. It was one of his biggest insecurities when he began to question his sexuality. He wondered if maybe it would have been better if he was born as a girl.

Picking up his pencil, Hiccup began to sketch. He drew himself, freckled and awkward, but with softer eyes, fuller lips, and a thinner neck. Slowly, a portrait of a scrawny girl formed on the page. She had bony shoulders, a round nose, and small braids throughout her hair. Hiccup bit his lip when there was nothing more he wanted to change. The girl on the page looked nice. She wasn't gorgeous or pretty, but she was nice. He imagined what it would be like if he was born like that, if he was a small, cute girl rather than a scrawny, weak boy. He could talk with other girls about liking a boy without having to feel ashamed or guilty. Or maybe he would be a lesbian. That was a strange thought. Maybe he would have had a crush on Astrid or Ruffnut. Maybe not Ruffnut; she was terrifying. He honestly did like Astrid though, admired her, so he would probably crush on her pretty hard if he were a lesbian.

Really thinking about it, his life probably wouldn't be much different if he were a girl. He would still have been the scrawny, homosexual freak with no friends. His father would have probably pushed him into sports all the same, to be in track or field hockey like Astrid or, gods forbid, rugby like Ruffnut. Worst of all, he didn't like the girl on the page. She looked like him, but it wasn't right. There was something innately wrong about it.

Hiccup sighed and tore the page out of the sketch book, crumpling it into a ball. 'Why couldn't I be born normal,' he thought. Taking his pencil in his hand again, he began to sketch again. He started by drawing Toothless as girl, then others, everyone he could think, as the opposite gender. His mood started to brighten when he got to Aster and Jack. He put them together on the page, made them look as though they were arguing, but in a lighthearted, playful way. Aster as a woman looked like he could give any boy a run for their money. She had strong shoulders and sharp cheekbones and that same cocky smirk. Jack came across very pretty, despite the despondent pout Hiccup portrayed on her face. He wished he had some color, even if it was only one shade. He very much wanted to add a bright splash of icy blue to the ends of the long hair.

In the end, Hiccup had even drawn his father. It was the first time he found himself smiling and laughing when thinking of Stoick in a long while. He couldn't imagine what his father would look like as a woman so he ended up drawing him beard and all but in a dress. He even shaded the face to give the illusion of heavy, gaudy make up. Gods, his father would have hated it, but it still made Hiccup laugh. Despite everything, he really missed him. He even missed the awkward conversations they had when he tried, and failed horribly, to relate to him.

Hiccup hadn't felt this alone the entire time he had been away from home. He missed his father, he missed Gobber, he missed Toothless, Hookfang, Fishlegs, Barf, Belch, Astrid, Stormfly, he even missed the twins Ruffnut and Tuffnut and almost, just _almost_, missed Snotlout. And he felt stupid. Stupid for getting so worked up because of a few painted nails and stupid for sitting there wallowing in self pity. He began to regret coming out to Jack. He had seemed perfectly fine with it at the time, but Hiccup now doubted the sincerity, over thinking every little word or look. Maybe Jack painted his nails to make fun of him? Maybe he would feel uncomfortable being around Hiccup now? Maybe he would make fun of him behind his back? Maybe, maybe, maybe.

Hiccup took a big breath and counted to four before letting the air out of his lungs. He hid his sketchbook and the sign language book underneath a thin blanket so that no one would steal them and grabbed the crutches. Carefully navigating around sleeping bodies and huddled groups, he made his way outside. The air was cold and biting and seemed to blow straight through him, rattling his bones. A shiver ran through his spine and goosebumps rose along his arms and neck. It had gotten late and he couldn't see the nose on his face so he walked slowly, mindful of the uneven sidewalks. Having been in Burgess for a little while, he knew which streets to avoid this time of night and wandered along those he knew to be empty and relatively harmless. He stopped when he got to the alley where he and Toothless had slept the first night in Burgess. Placing the crutches to the side, he slid down against the wall. The ground was cold even through his jeans and he had to pull the sleeves of his jacket over numb fingers. It had gotten colder since he had last spent the night outside and while the center had a draft and chill that floated in the air, it still wasn't as frigid and biting as out there.

He had not planned to sleep outside the center, only planning on taking a walk to clear his head, but now that he had walked this far in the cold he didn't feel like going back. He fell asleep against the brick wall with only his jacket to keep him warm.

5. Chapter 5

When Hiccup woke up in the alley, he was dazed for a few moments. Half of him expected to be next to Toothless while the other half expected to wake up in the homeless shelter. Instead he was alone on the street with cold ears and a runny nose. He sat where he was for a few minutes, wondering why he ever thought it was a good idea to leave the center. When finally the cold became too much, he took his crutches and began to make his way back to Guardian Center. He had to stop halfway because the chilled metal of the crutches began to numb his hands and rain began to fall. Hiccup cursed the skies and Thor

but trudged along regardless. By the time he arrived at the center, he was soaking wet and shivering rather violently. Trying to balance on one crutch and pull open the slippery door without dropping the other one Hiccup ended up losing his balance and falling back into a puddle. He groaned and remained on the ground for several moments, watching the rain fall, until someone opened the door and began to fuss over him.

"Are you alright?" they asked, helping up and checking him for injuries. He nodded and let them usher him inside. They gave him an extra blanket and cup of hot water then left him to sit in his corner. He was there for fifteen minutes before Aster entered the building. The older man went to speak with a few volunteers before a young girl, one of the volunteers that helped Hiccup inside, approached him. She whispered something in his ear then looked pointedly over at Hiccup, who groaned inwardly, burrowing his face into the blankets. When he looked back up, Aster was walking towards him, eyebrows slightly furrowed. He knelt in front of him and gave a little chuckle.

"You look like a drenched cat," he said, ruffling Hiccup's wet hair, "what possessed you to go out in this weather?"

"Oh, you know, I just love that cold, wet feeling," Hiccup shrugged, hugging the blanket a little closer around his body. He was surprised about how hoarse his voice sounded; the words needed to fight their way up his throat. After he spoke, Aster's brows furrowed deeper. He reached forward and placed his hand on Hiccup's forehead, leaving it there for a moment before pulling away and sighing.

"You're burning up."

Aster waved down a few volunteers and left Hiccup for a bit to speak with them. Hiccup raised his own hand to his forehead to feel his temperature. It did feel a bit warm. It wasn't the first time since leaving home he had gotten sick and it was never fun. He hoped that wasn't the case now, but he couldn't deny he wasn't feeling his best. His throat was scratchy, his head was foggy, and he was nauseous on top of it all. He had attributed it mostly to not eating in a while and being in the cold, but adding a fever to the mix, wellâ€¦

Aster returned to Hiccup with a cheap thermometer and three small packs of saltine crackers. "Try and dry off," he handed everything to Hiccup, "and take your temperature. I'll be back later to check on you."

Hiccup nodded and Aster mussed up his hair once more before leaving to start on his tasks. Hiccup placed the thermometer under his tongue and, when it beeped, was unhappy to read a temperature of 99.5 degrees Fahrenheit. He was definitely sick.

The crackers weren't much, and they were terribly stale, but they at least he wasn't quite as hungry anymore. By the time Aster returned, Hiccup was mostly dry, but still shivering underneath the blankets. When he informed him of his temperature, Aster ran his hand down his face.

"Alright," he said, lowering himself to sit on the floor in front of Hiccup, "it's not too bad. Just keep an eye on your temperature and if you need anything, tell someone to come find me. Got it, mate?"

Hiccup nodded and Aster continued. "Why'd you have to go and get yerself sick from the cold now anyways?"

"You can't actually get sick from the cold," Hiccup sniffed, "it's an old wives' tale. The cold exasperates the symptoms but you need germs to actually get sick."

Aster's only response was an incredulous look.

"Yeah, not a great excuse, but what do you expect when you sleep with a bunch of homeless people-" Aster snorted and Hiccup realized what he had said and how it could have sounded, "_I meant_", he rolled his eyes, "slept in a roomful of people who probably don't have the best immune systems. There must be germs floating around everywhere here."

"You just keep thinking those happy thoughts," Aster got to his feet, "I'm gonna finish a few things up; let me know if you feel any worse."

Hiccup nodded and Aster left him once again. Once he was alone again, he shortly fell back asleep, having not slept well outside the previous night. He didn't wake up again until lunch was being served, at which point he felt quite a bit better. His headache and chills were gone and his appetite had returned. It seemed as though it was only a twenty four hour sickness and the worst of it was over. So when Aster checked in on him once more, he told him he was fine. And for a while he was, but around seven at night, the chills came back. All at once the headache and nausea returned with a vengeance and two blankets were not enough to keep him warm. His temperature reached 101.3 and he vomited twice before they called Aster, who had apparently asked to be notified if he got worse.

Aster came in with hair wet from a shower and half of a cup of coffee in his hand. Hiccup was vaguely aware of being asked questions and responding, but he couldn't comprehend what either of them was saying. Aster was growing more concerned by the second. If the boy's temperature got any higher, he would have to take him to the hospital. As it was now, it was dangerous for him to remain at the center without warmth or medicine. When Hiccup began to speak nonsense, at one point calling him 'Snotface,' Aster knew he should probably take the boy back to his flat for the night. At the very least, he could get him some ibuprofen and watch to make sure the fever doesn't get any higher. The only problem was getting him there. It was a good twenty minute walk for Aster from the center to his flat and Hiccup would never be able to make that sick with crutches.

Deciding the best thing to do was beg North for help again, Aster pulled out his cell phone. It had just gone to voicemail when North picked up. It was apparent he had run for the phone by his breathless voice.

"Hello?" he panted, "Who is calling?"

"Hey North, it's Aster" Aster tapped his fingers against his thigh as he spoke, "sorry to call you so late, but I've a favor to ask."

"Ah, I will do what I can, but I warn you I am very busy at workshop at moment. What is problem?"

"I'm here at the center and Hiccup's really sick. He's been vomiting and's got a high fever. I thought it'd maybe it'd be better if he stayed somewhere else for the night."

"So you want he stay with us?" North asked.

"Nah, mate," Aster shook his head despite knowing North could not see him. "I was just hopin' you could maybe give us a ride to my place. I don't think he'd make it walking."

"Of course, that is easy. I am busy with workshop but Jack is doing nothing. I will send him over." North laughed.

"Right, tell him to get off his lazy date and get over here then," Aster smiled as North laughed louder, glad to have the help, "Really, mate, thanks heaps."

"Not problem. Little Hiccup s so tiny, sickness may wipe him out. Needs all the help he can get, da?"

"Yeah, it's pretty bad but here's hoping I don't have to call in the ambo. I'm not sure what I'll do tomorrow though. I took today off after travelling, but I can't afford tomorrow as well." Aster rubbed his temple with his free hand, feeling a headache coming on. He had been saving up all his sick days and vacation days so that he could return home to Sydney for Easter. He'd already booked the tickets and couldn't afford to switch them. "If he's not better by tomorrow, wellâ€¦"

"Do not worry, friend, all will be well. You will figure out what is best when time comes," North said soothingly. "Now. I go tell Jack to help and you take care of little Hiccup."

"Yeah, thanks again North," Aster hung up and went to inform Hiccup of the plan. He grunted in response without opening his eyes. Aster wasn't sure if he really heard him or was just acknowledging his presence, but it was enough for now. He got one of the younger volunteers to gather up Hiccup's stuff-the crutches and books as well as one of the blankets- while Aster helped him stand. Hiccup paled once he was upright and looked utterly miserable, but managed to hold himself stable. Aster took most of his weight as he led him to the door where they waited for Jack.

It only took about five or ten minutes before the white haired boy arrived, stepping out of North's car with a worried expression. Aster instructed him to take Hiccup's belongings from the volunteer and place them in the trunk while he helped the sick boy into the passenger's seat (knowing from experience one could get carsick in the back seat quite easily, especially with North's driving). The ride to the apartment was quiet other than Hiccup's occasional sniffles or groans or Jack clearing his throat. It was obvious Jack was curious to what had happened, but was (thankfully) tactful enough to let Aster rest for a minute instead of asking.

Arriving at his flat, Aster was thankful they had finally fixed the elevator. It had been broken for nearly a month and had only been attended to when an elderly woman living on the top floor complained about hip problems. Aster knew for a fact the old bat's hips were fine, but he wasn't protesting. When the elevator lurched upwards,

Hiccup looked queasy, so Aster helped him to the floor so he could sit. When they reached his floor, he decided it would be best to simply carry the boy the rest of the way. Hiccup did not object but just let his head rest against Aster's chest while he handed Jack the keys to his flat.

Inside, Aster set the boy on the couch and threw the blanket over him. He then went to the bathroom to grab a thermometer, which he washed quickly then handed to Jack.

"Take his temperature," he directed, "I'm going to get him some ibuprofen."

Jack did as he was told and when Aster came back with a pill bottle and cup of water, he informed him the temperature had gone down to 100.5. It wasn't much, but at least it wasn't getting worse. Hiccup managed to swallow the pills with some struggle and promptly fell into a fitful sleep. Jack took the opportunity to interrogate Aster.

"What the hell happened? He was fine yesterday," he questioned. Aster collapsed into his armchair, pinching the bridge of his nose, and shrugged.

"No clue mate. I guess he came in this morning soaking wet from the rain with a mild fever. Thought it was just a little wog, a small cold, but I got a call later that he was sick and chundering."

"Chundering?" Jack looked confused.

"Yeah, mate, chunder," Jack still didn't seem to get it. "Liquid laugh? Technicolor yawn? Blowing chunks?"

"Ah! That one I know," Jack nodded, "gross."

"Yeah, well, I called North and here we are." Aster shrugged again and rested his head back on the chair.

"I got that. Can we go back to how you call vomiting a Technicolor yawn? Or a liquid laugh for that matter? What the hell?" Jack snorted, then looked ashamed when Hiccup shifted, having half awoken from the noise. "He's alright though, right? Because North just told me he was sick and I was seriously worried for a minute. He looks like death warmed over."

"He should be fine. It's probably just the flu or something," Aster reassured him, "but we should keep an eye on him to make sure."

"We?"

"Caught that, didja?" Aster chuckled, "yeah, I was wonderin' what you were doing tomorrow. I've got work and if he gets any worse, he'll need a doctor. I don't feel comfortable leaving him on his own like this."

"I have a Bio test at noon but I can skip my other classes no problem," Jack sat on the arm of the couch near Hiccup's feet. Aster wanted to yell at him for it but let it slide considering there was

nowhere else to sit.

"Thanks Jack," Aster sighed, "I know you still hate me, soâ€|"

"I don't hate you," Jack groaned. He ran one hand through his hair, trying to think of how to word his thoughts. "I just think you're a hypocritical ass sometimes. What has Flynn really done to make you hate him so much? He's stolen shit and he lives on the street, but so has Hiccup so why is he any different? I don't exactly have the best record either, so I just don't get it. You preach helping people, but then you turn around and chew me out for trying to do just that."

"Look, Jack," Aster sat up a bit straighter so that he could look him in the eyes, "when I first moved here and started volunteering at the center there was this one guy. His family had kicked him out of the house when he turned 18 and he slept at the shelter most nights. One of the volunteers, a young girl, grew especially attached to him, started to fall in love with him-" he was interrupted

"I'm not in love with Flynn if that's where this is going," Jack blanched.

"No," Aster rolled his eyes, "just hear me out. So he ran into a rough patch of some sort and asked this girl if he and some friends could crash at her place. She was reluctant but caved and let them stay. Long story short she woke up to them raiding her medicine cabinet and jewelry and one of them knocked her down the stairs. She was alright, got out with only a fractured leg, but my point remains. This guy, he wasn't a bad kid in general, but living like that you can't always predict what people will do."

"Aster, I'm not about to let Flynn into our homes. He'd rob us blind and I know it. I just didn't want him to go to jail," Jack shrugged, "I still think he can change though, so why can't we give him the benefit of the doubt?"

"Fine, deal. We'll give him the benefit of the doubt and I'll _try_ not to judge him so harshly. In return, you never do anything illegal for him again. If he's in trouble with the cops, he deals with it himself, got it?" Aster held out his hand. Jack gave it a hesitant look then took it with his own, smiling wide.

"Great, you got your group therapy," Hiccup groaned from the couch, "now could you shut up?" and they couldn't help but laugh at that.

* * *

><p>Jack dropped by the next morning so that Aster could go to work. Hiccup was sleeping soundly on the couch, coughing or shifting every once in a while, so Jack sat about and tried to study for his Bio test. He managed to stay focused for a good hour before he got bored and ended up upside down in the armchair staring blankly at his book. He was almost tempted to wake Hiccup up just so he would have company and wouldn't have to be so bored. He resisted, but only barely.<p>

When noon came near, Jack left Hiccup alone, having decided with Aster he would be fine alone for an hour. He made his way to campus, not feeling terribly well prepared for his test but ready to get it

over with. It was an incredibly boring way to spend an hour but he felt like he did fairly well by the end of it. At the very least, he was almost certain he passed it.

Back at Aster's flat, Hiccup woke up exceptionally confused. The fact that his head was pounding did not make it any easier to identify his situation. He was on a couch, which was far more comfortable than anywhere he'd slept in a long time, but a bit disconcerting nevertheless. He didn't at first remember how he had gotten to this couch but a note on the coffee table helped kick start his brain.

Call if you need anything-Jack

A phone number was scribbled as well and a portable phone was placed next to it. Hiccup could barely make out any of the numbers in Jack's handwriting, making the note rather useless in the end. It did, however, remind him of the occurrences of the night before. He remembered feeling absolutely terrible and Aster bringing him back to his apartment to sleep. It touched Hiccup's heart the lengths the man went to in order to help him when it was entirely unnecessary. Jack as well, he supposed.

Hiccup tried sitting up, but his body ached and the action only made his head pound worse so he settled back onto the couch and threw his arms over his eyes. He was feeling rather awkward, alone (he assumed he was alone) in Aster's apartment. He didn't quite know what to do other than lay down and stare at the ceiling. At the moment, however, that didn't sound like too bad a plan. He resolved to do just that and stared straight at the ceiling for what felt like an entire hour. It was probably more like five or ten minutes, but it was so remarkably boring it felt like an eternity. When it became too much, he turned his head to the side and counted the blades of grass in a picture Aster had on his wall. He had reached 216, give or take, when he heard the sound of the door unlocking. On an impulse, he clenched his eyes shut and pretended to be asleep. He realized, however, that this was ridiculous and opened them again. Jack came inside, throwing a set of keys into a small bowl, and smiled when he saw Hiccup.

"Finally awake, sleeping beauty?" he sang, sauntering over to the armchair and sitting down. Hiccup rolled his eyes.

"What time is it?" he asked in lieu of a response.

"1:30; you've been out for over twelve hours," Jack reached over to pat his head to which Hiccup groaned as though it were painful. It wasn't, but it seemed like the proper response.

"Do you want anything to eat? I haven't had any lunch yet," Jack continued. Hiccup thought about it for a moment. He was feeling a bit dizzy but his stomach had settled significantly since earlier so perhaps some food would help. He told Jack as much and they made their way to the kitchen area of the room. Aster's apartment was a fairly small and only had one room, other than the bedroom and bathroom, which consisted of a kitchenette and living room all in one. Rather than bother with the crutches, Hiccup simply let Jack assist him to a chair at the small table near the stove where he sat wrapped in his blanket. Jack went about preparing a pot of chicken noodle soup as well as a sandwich for himself.

It was a very mundane and domestic task until Jack knocked over a bottle of vegetable oil with his elbow. The bottle fell and the cap, which was not tightened properly, gave away. A splash of oil spilled straight onto the burn and flames shot all the way to the top of the stove. They gave way quickly and Jack stifled what remained with a towel. Quickly shutting off the stove and moving the pot of soup, Jack took a deep breath then began to laugh.

"Oh fuck," he chuckled, "I seriously thought we were gonna die for a second. Oh man, Aster'll kill me if there's any scorch marks on the stove." He began to investigate. Luckily, any marks were superficial at most and easily cleaned. When he was satisfied with the state of the stove he twirled to face Hiccup and made a face as though he were trying to look at his own forehead, "how are my eyebrows? Please tell me I didn't burn my eyebrows off."

His face fell, however, when he saw the look on Hiccup's. His eyes were wide and seemed to stare straight through Jack. It was as though they were still watching a flame dance in the air despite them being long extinguished. He looked very empty. There was no life in his face except for a very slight quiver in his lips.

Anxiously, Jack took a step closer, calling Hiccup's name and placing a tentative hand on the boy's shoulder. Life returned to his face in a flash of fear and he jerked back so suddenly that he lost balance on the chair and fell hard on the floor, the chair toppling on top of him. The impact caused a small coughing fit, and Jack was at a loss for how to help. He was about to fetch him a cup of water when the coughs settled down, though his body was still racked with tremors. Jack tried to approach him again, a bit softer this time.

"Hey, you okay?" he asked quietly, careful not to startle him. His words seemed to rouse Hiccup from whatever state he was in as the shudders lessened and his face calmed. He nodded slowly and carefully sat up against the fridge with his arms wrapped around his torso.

"Sorry," he muttered hoarsely.

"Don't apologize," Jack moved the chair out of the way and sat Indian style in front of the other boy, "are you sure you're alright? Do you have a fire phobia?"

"It's called pyrophobia, and no, I don't," Hiccup shook his head but would not look Jack in the eye.

"If you didn't have it, you wouldn't know the name. No one knows shit like that for no reason," Jack smirked a bit, hoping to lighten the mood. Hiccup bit his lip.

"It just caught me off guard," Hiccup was resolute but Jack couldn't help but notice the slight catch in his voice. He shifted so that he was sitting next to Hiccup and placed an arm around his shoulder.

"Wanna talk about it?" Jack asked after a minute of simply sitting there. Hiccup shook his head so Jack continued to just sit next to him, hoping he was being at least a little comforting. It was a little bit awkward as Jack didn't know whether he was supposed to

speaking or just sit in hushed stillness. Eventually the silence was broken and Hiccup spoke up.

"The other day, you asked me why I left home," he said, speaking more into his arms than to Jack.

"Yeah," Jack replied, chuckling a bit at the memory, "and you told me you killed a man." Hiccup grimaced and avidly avoided Jack's eyes. His face seemed very much as though it was carved by a great classical sculptor and something in the weight of his expression hit Jack. He realized what Hiccup was trying to say.

"No," he breathed, "Hiccup, you're kidding, right?" Hiccup only shrugged weakly, frowning deeper and still refusing to look anywhere but at his foot. Jack anxiously waited for the other boy to snort out in laughter, to tell him it was a joke. But Hiccup didn't laugh at all so Jack raked his fingers through his hair and moved so that he was once again sitting in front of him.

"Alright," he breathed in deeply, "you're not telling me the full story here, and you are definitely the type of person who would blame themselves for an accident or mistake, so just tell me what happened."

"It wasn't an accident," Hiccup finally looked up at Jack and he was struck by resolve in his eyes. For all that he was trembling and afraid just minutes earlier, he seemed set in stone now. His eyes were locked to Jack's and his jaw was clenched tight. It was as though he was searching Jack for a sign. Of what Jack didn't know but he seemed to find it because his face softened and he looked away again. "I would do it again," he said softly. Jack reached forward to hold the boy's head in his hands, looking down at him as sternly as he could manage.

"Hiccup," he said, "you're starting to scare me so you're going to stop all of this riddle and half truth shit and tell me what happened. Alright?"

Hiccup nodded and Jack removed his hands. Hiccup opened his mouth, supposedly to begin, but Jack realized sitting in front of Aster's fridge was perhaps not the best place to have this conversation. He shushed Hiccup and went about moving them back towards the couch and arm chair. Once they were sitting comfortably, Hiccup took a steadying breath and began.

* * *

><p>AN: I feel like I should apologize for this chapter for some reason. This chapter was difficult because of how I wanted to portray Hiccup. I see a lot of fan work that turns him into a weak crying mess which I don't think is who he is. I wanted to display the gravity of his situation without making him feel flimsy, which I hope came across.

>Thanks for reading!<p>

6. Henrik Hamish Haddick III: Part 1

A/N: So the whole backstory was getting longer than expected so I decided to match the flow of the previous chapters I would split it

into two. Here is the first part relating how Hiccup got to be on the streets. Enjoy!

* * *

><p>When Henrik Hamish Haddick III was fifteen, he wanted nothing more than to graduate high school, join the police academy, and prove himself to his father. Stoick "the Vast" Haddick was Berk's police chief and was greatly respected by the entire community. He was large, strong, brave, and heroic. Henrik was none of these. Given a lineup of all the boys in town, no one would have ever picked him out as Stoick's son. Stoick was the star of the football team in high school. Henrik popped two footballs and gave himself a bloody nose when he tried out. That's not even mentioning the damage done to the assistant coach. Stoick was loved by everyone. Henrik was avoided by everyone. Stoick was good at everything he did. Henrik messed everything up. Stoick used to get all the girls. Henrik, well, Henrik could get all the girls to laugh in his face and even a few to use him as a punching bag (he still scars from Ruffnut). In short, he was a screw up, a mistake, and a disappointment and he was painfully aware of this.<p>

No one in Berk expected anything to come of little Henrik, not when there were so many other children with such promising futures. Berk was a rough town, if it wasn't snowing it was hailing, and this seemed to follow in the citizens. People in Berk appreciated grit and a rough and tough attitude. This made teenagers like Snorri, Hiccup's cousin, a fan favorite. Snorri was captain of the football team and had plans to take over Stoick's position as chief of police sometime in the future. The police were highly esteemed in Berk and it was considered a great honor to join the force so many students endeavored to enlist. Henrik was among this list. If he could somehow manage to join the force, Henrik knew he would finally be able to prove himself.

Things began to change, however, when the town was struck by a horrific murder. Inger, a small girl only seven years old, had been found, shot through the heart, on the side of a street known for Dragon activity. The Dragons were a well known group of criminals in Berk. They couldn't quite be called a gang but it was close. The group was the bane of Stoick's career. He would do anything to find their hideout and get rid of them once and for all.

Henrik could clearly remember hearing about it. His father had come home late one night looking exhausted. There was such a tired, sad look on his face that he was almost afraid to ask what had happened. When he did, his father shook his head and related the events, then told Henrik not to wander about alone for a while. Though he was not usually one to follow orders, he did as he was told.

The next few days, the entire town was abuzz with memorial plans and safety precautions. Stoick was barely ever home and when he was, he was solemn and quiet. It was the same with everyone in town. People, who were usually so loud and rowdy, were now quiet and sad. Their grief only faded when they found the man suspected of the murder.

When Micheal Nitchman, better known as Hookfang, was arrested the town's sorrow turned quite suddenly to vengeful fury. Hookfang was a well recognized member of the Dragons known for arson related crimes

but never convicted of anything. Stoick had been after him for a long time and suspected him of being rather high up in the Dragons' rankings. When accused of the crime, he had reportedly refused to comment and thus his guilt was widely accepted as truth.

"They finally caught that good for nothing, murder scum," Snorri had said at lunch the next day. He was sitting at the table next to Henrik's with Astrid, Fishlegs, and the twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut. Henrik was sitting by himself.

"Bastard's not even trying to deny it," he continued, spearing his fork through a piece of over cooked pork. "I hope they fry the sucker."

There was a chorus of agreement from the table and Henrik concurred silently as well. It was a commonly accepted fact that any fire started in Berk without a proper explanation had been started by Hookfang and the murder of little Inger had been unforgivable. Stoick said he didn't even show regret. He had apparently refused completely to comment on the events and would only smirk when officer's tried to ask any further questions.

Henrik went home that night sure more than ever that he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. Stoick himself was still at the station, still very busy dealing with the Hookfang case, so Henrik lounged around in his room with a book. Eventually he heard a noise from downstairs. Assuming his father was home, Henrik hurried down the stairs to greet him. Instead, he was greeted by unfamiliar faces.

There were two people standing at the bottom of his stairs, a man and a woman, both older than Henrik but still rather young. The man was tall with a shock of platinum blond hair and pale grey eyes. The woman's hair was a more golden yellow with a streak of aqua blue in her bangs, stunning blue eyes, and a nose ring. Most remarkably, trailing up the man's arm and on the side of the woman's neck, were dragon tattoos. This was the mark of anyone associated with the Dragons, for obvious reasons.

Henrik panicked and dashed to his father's room, where he knew Stoick kept a gun locked away in case of emergency. As he ran he barely caught the duo's flustered conversation.

"Shit," the man cursed, "there's a kid. No one said there'd be a kid here. We're bailing, now."

"But what about-" the woman started but was seemingly cut off.

"He can take care of himself. We've got to bolt, go!"

Henrik fumbled with the key to the drawer where the gun was hidden. They seemed to be leaving, but he wasn't taking any chances. He snatched the gun out of the drawer then huddled in the corner of the bedroom. He carefully switched the safety off, knowing how to handle the weapon thanks to lessons from his father. Never before had he been so thankful for them.

He waited with bated breath for any sound and jumped any time the pipes made a sound. He was shaking so bad he thought he could hear the gun rattle. There were Dragons in his house, a group whose

members had only just weeks ago killed a small child. He felt certain he was going to die, right then, in that corner. They were going to come up and kill him as revenge for his father arresting Hookfang and he would never have a chance to do anything with his life. People would only remember him as that one screw up.

'Oh it's too bad about that Henrik kid, but we're probably all better off without him.'

The door creaked. It must have been the loudest thing he had ever heard but still he wasn't entirely sure it wasn't just in his head. Henrik jerked and raised the gun with shaking hands when another unfamiliar man came into view. He was tall with black hair and vivid green eyes that seemed to reflect light like a cat's. He seemed surprised to see Henrik at first, but his eyes hardened dangerously when he noticed the gun. He took a step closer, slowly, and Henrik panicked. He fired.

He was prepared for the shock of the noise, having been to the police force's shooting gallery before to see his father or Gobber shoot a few, but the recoil caught him by surprise. His arms were thrown back and he nearly smacked himself in the face. He quickly recollected himself, unsure whether or not the first one had hit. It had. The man had fallen to the ground, holding his shin in pain. Henrik pointed the gun again, still shaking violently, and warned him.

"Don't come any closer," he stuttered, his voice cracking. The man didn't move and Henrik raised the gun. It would be so easy to kill him now and be safe but he couldn't pull the trigger. He looked into the man's eyes and there was such a look of resignation and fear and humanity that he just couldn't bear to fire. He faltered and the man must have noticed because he suddenly dashed forward. He was extraordinarily fast and managed to knock the weapon out of Henrik's hand and pin him to the wall in one swift movement. Henrik stared, wide eyed, up at him. His heart was beating a mile a minute and his lungs were struggling for air. When the man's grip tightened, he clenched his eyes shut and turned away. He was sure, now, that this was the end. But as quickly as it had happened, the man released him. In a stupor, he watched him limp away as quickly as he could manage with a bullet hole through his leg. After several minutes, when he believed the man had left, Henrik unsteadily climbed to his feet. He made it an impressive two steps before he fainted straight away.

Henrik awoke to facial hair. When his eyes blinked open, the first thing he saw was two masses of scraggly blond or red hair. It took several confused moments before he realized his father and Gobber were hovering over him.

"Henrik," his father called when he noticed his eyes had opened, "oh Henrik are ye alright? The neighbors heard a gunshot and saw some strange man leave the house and thought ta ca' me. I saw the blood and thought the worst. Whit happened son?"

"Dad," Henrik jolted up as he remembered what had occurred, "Dad, the Dragons. They were here, three of them. Oh gods, I thought they were going to kill me."

"Surprised they dinna, honestly," Gobber shrugged but Stoick sent him a glare to tell him he wasn't helping.

"Are ye hurt?" Stoick asked, giving a sideways glance to the blood stain on his carpet near the foot of his bed.

"What? No, I'm fine. That's not mine. I shot him in the leg," Henrik explained and would have been a bit offended by the surprised look on Stoick's face were they under different circumstances.

"Ye shot im? Did he have a gun too?" Stoick asked. He was honestly stunned that his son had managed to injure a Dragon of all people.

"No, I don't think they expected me to be here," Henrik shrugged.

"O course they expected ye to be here," Stoick boomed, "whit else dae ye think they wanted? They were here fer revenge, Henrik." Stoick brought his hand up to massage away a growing headache and used the other to signal Henrik not to speak yet. "Haud up a minute now. Ye had a gun? An you let im get away? Whit were ye doing?"

"I was nearly killed by Dragons and that's what you're worried about? What kind of Dad comes home to this and asks," Henrik adopted his best impression of his father, "well, why dinna shoot im? Any son o mine woulda shot im dead. Yer not but a disappointment."

"Enough," Stoick roared and stood to his full height. It was an intimidating sight to anyone who hadn't lived with it his entire life. To Henrik, it was just like every other day. "I got a ca at work in tha middle of tha night and come home half expecting ya ta be dead on tha fluir an ye give me back sass? This is serious, Henrik, tha Dragons are out fer revenge."

"You think I don't know that?" Henrik stood, as tall as he could though that was barely up to his father's chest, and glared up. "Of course I know that, Dad, they were here. I thought I was going to die!" he stormed out, slamming the door shut behind him and stomping to his own room in a huff.

"I just din understand him," Stoick sighed and sat on the side of the bed, holding his head in one massive hand.

"I din understand either of ye," Gobber supplied, looking between Stoick, the door, and the blood stain on the floor.

"Just call in a squad fer me, will ye? I need this cleaned up an I want sum protection fer Henrik."

For the next few days, Henrik was not allowed to leave the house even to go to school. His only contact with anyone was his father, Gobber, and a handful of officers assigned to watch the house. It was terribly company in all. Gobber wasn't bad to talk to, but even he was too much after several days. Gobber was a retired officer, having lost a hand and a foot in the line of duty. He still consulted for Stoick often but mainly worked in his personal workshop living off of government money. He was talented with blacksmithing and metal work. He even crafted his own prosthetics with surprising skill and he had taught Henrik everything he knew.

After a week of confinement the fear had faded into boredom and, stir crazy, Henrik managed to convince Stoick to allow him to attend

school. The deal was he was to go straight to school in the morning, where a handful of officers were playing security guard. They had been doing so since the Dragons showed up at his house, as a precaution and to help the students feel safer. After school, he was to head straight home or notify Stoick that he would be with someone else (not that he ever went to hang out with friends, he would need friends to do that).

For the next week or so, he followed these rules strictly, but he soon became antsy once again. There had been no further sign of Dragon activity and even the officers assigned to watch him were growing weary of constantly guarding him. So one day, after a particularly nasty argument the night before, Henrik told Stoick he was going to work on a project with Fishlegs after school. Fishlegs was one of the few kids at school who didn't pick on Henrik, being a bit of an outcast himself. He wouldn't call them friends in the slightest, but it was probably the closest he had.

Not having an actual project to work on, and not knowing Fishlegs well enough to ask to simply hang out, Henrik ended up just walking through town. He was fairly confident he would be safe; the sun was still bright and people were walking casually about. With his luck, though, he really should have known better.

When the sun began to fall closer to the horizon, Henrik decided it would be best to head home. He did not expect to nearly trip over the very man who had caused all of his recent troubles. There, leaning against an abandoned building on the side of an empty street underneath a thick blanket, sat the man with dark hair and green eyes. He was glaring hatefully at him but made not movements otherwise. Henrik stared in shock, his legs frozen in place. The man scoffed, turned his head to look away from Henrik and down the street the way he'd come.

Finally Henrik was able to gather his wits about him and bolt the rest of the way home, breathing heavily. He slammed the door shut behind him, double checking to make sure it and all the windows were locked. As terrified as he was, though, he was also curious. The man could have gotten him, then and there, and nobody would have been the wiser. So why didn't he? He briefly considered telling his father of the event, but decided it would get him in more trouble than anything else and opted to keep it to himself.

Before he had a chance to contemplate any more, his cell phone buzzed in his pocket. Picking it up, he was greeted by the loud, booming voice of Gobber.

"Whaur in Hel are ye, boy? I ca'ed that Fishlegs boy an he hadn't heard o any projects," he yelled so loud Henrik had to hold the phone away from his ear, "if yer dead, I'll have yer head, boy."

"I'm not dead, Gobber," Hiccup groaned, placing the phone back up next to his ear. "I was just tired of being cooped up in the house, so I took the long way home. It's not a big deal."

"Not a big deal?" Gobber bellowed, "Not a big deal!? A Dragon's not gonna hesitate to kill ya, Henrik, thay aren't like ye and I. Yer just lucky I dinna tell yer father. Then ye'd be dead fer sure."

"Please don't tell Dad," he pleaded, "I promise I won't do it again, just don't tell him. He'll never let me leave the house again."

"At least then ye couldn't cause any mair trouble," Gobber sighed.

"Please, please Gobber," Henrik's pleas were met with silence, "I'll help out extra in the workshop for the next month, I promise, just don't tell him."

"Fine, have it yer wey," Gobber relented, finally, "but din say I dinna warn ye."

"Thanks," Henrik released a breath of relief, "I promise I won't cause any more trouble."

"We both know that's a lie," Gobber said in defeat and hung up.

Henrik trudged up to his room and thought about the day. 'A Dragon's not gonna gesitate to kill ya' Gobber had said. 'thay aren't like ye and I.' But he was still standing there because the green eyed man had spared him, not once, but twice now.

Decided to put the man out of his mind, Henrik did as he was supposed to for the next few days. Eventually, however, he simply couldn't leave well enough alone and he let his curiosity get the better of him. He knew he wouldn't be able to pull the same trick as before, Gobber was watching him like a hawk, but there were ways around him. He went straight home after school, nodding briefly to the unmarked cop car parked across the street. Then Henrik went up to his room and spent an hour finishing homework and doodling in the margins of his history book. Finally, he decided it would be safe to sneak out.

Henrik had the window open and was formulating how to get down when he had an idea. Perhaps it was best not to go empty handed. He shut the window loudly and rushed down the stairs, nearly falling down them, and into the kitchen. He opened the fridge and rummaged through their leftovers. They didn't have much that was any good, so Henrik decided on a tuna sandwich which he prepared and wrapped in plastic before stuffing it into a bag. He stopped a moment to reflect on what he was about to do.

'You're about to deliberately sneak out of your house, which is guarded by police officers, to see a criminal who just recently broke into your house, and you're bringing him a tuna sandwich? Gods, Henrik, how dumb are you? If he doesn't kill you, Dad sure will.'

Regardless, Henrik was determined. He went back upstairs and opened his window. Checking to make sure no one was in view, he carefully climbed out and onto an outstretched branch of a tree. Carefully he shimmied towards the trunk and descended downwards. He made it to the second branch from the ground without problem when he heard it creak beneath him. He held his breath and tried to shift his weight safely down towards the next branch but could not stop the limb from breaking. He crashed to the ground, the lower branch hitting his stomach on the way down. He cringed, clenching his eyes shut as though if he couldn't see anyone they would not see him. Fortunately,

it seemed as though no one had heard the noise. Unfortunately, he was surely going to have a large bruise covering his stomach for days. How would he explain that one?

Satisfied that no one was coming, Henrik dusted himself off and snuck into the wooded area behind the house. He stumbled through the trees for a while before, far enough away from the house, he emerged into the town. Growing more and more nervous with each passing block, Henrik began to doubt himself again. When he reached the corner around which he had encountered the man, he paused and took a deep breath.

'This is dumb,' he told himself. 'He's probably not even there anymore, and if he isâ€¦' he'd rather not think of what would happen if this didn't go well.

Steeling his nerves and closing his eyes, he took the last step around the corner. He opened his eyes to see the man, sitting just as he was before, underneath his thick blanket. He was looking at Henrik with a mix of humor and wariness.

"Uhhh," Henrik stammered. He hadn't actually thought of what he would do once he got here, other than offer him a fucking tuna fish sandwich (what the hell was he thinking?). "I, um, here!" Henrik thrust the sandwich forward and closed his eyes. Nothing happened. He peeked one eye open and saw the man staring back with one eyebrow quirked, looking thoroughly confused. He didn't seem to be moving anytime soon, so Henrik inched forward and set it down at his side before backing off.

"I was going to give you that, because I guess you're probably hungry and kind of to thank you for, you know, not killing meâ€¦ twice. I guess that's not something you thank people for, but there it is soâ€¦" Henrik rambled, not having anything else to say. The man looked between him and the sandwich then snickered quietly. Henrik blushed. Of course, if anyone could screw up talking with a criminal, it would be him.

None-the-less, the man picked up the sandwich and unwrapped it slowly. He carefully sniffed at it then took a tentative bite. Seeming satisfied, he began to devour the rest until there was only a small corner left. He looked about to finish it off, but paused, looking at Henrik, who was staring at him. He frowned for a second then held out the last of the sandwich to the short boy.

"What, no, I'm fine," he shook his head and held his hands up. He really didn't like tuna that much, but he seemed insistent. Henrik wondered if he was trying to be kind or if he was worried it was poisoned. Either way, he eventually relented and took the sandwich, forcing it down his throat. "Yum," he said sarcastically and the man chuckled quietly again. He was amazed. This was the man who he thought was going to kill him, but there he was laughing and eating tuna like any normal person.

Henrik took a step closer. This was apparently not the right move to make as the man's softened expression quickly turned fierce and he glared vehemently at him, a snarl on his lips. Henrik backed off, holding his hands up in surrender, but he continued to glare. The fear returned and Henrik decided perhaps that was enough for one day.

"I'm going to just," he pointed back down the street, trying to get his point across, "yeah, I'll leave nowâ€|uh" he stood for a moment before turning on his heel and walking briskly away.

Henrik ran nearly the entire way back to his house and quickly climbed the tree up to his room. Inside, he sunk against the wall and went over the day again in his head. He didn't even realize he was smiling until his cheeks began to hurt.

For the next few days Henrik was not able to leave the house; homework had unexpectedly piled up and Stoick had been home earlier than expected. After four days of metaphorical lock down, Henrik finally found he had a day to himself. He was barely in the house for five minutes before he was out his window, another tuna fish sandwich in his hands and his sketchbook in a bag slung over his shoulder. Making it to the street in record time, Henrik was pleased to see he was still there, against the wall of the abandoned building. He didn't look nearly as surprised to see him this time. Henrik smiled.

"I, uh, I brought you another sandwich," he stepped forward and set it down next to him again then moved to sit a few feet away, watching expectantly. The man stared for a minute but soon relented and began to eat the sandwich. Once he was finished, he closed his eyes and rested his head back against the building, hoping the boy would be gone when he opened his eyes. Alas, this wasn't so. He heard a rustling and opened one eye only to see the boy had scooted closer. He rolled his eyes and scooted further away. Henrik frowned but didn't make any attempts to move closer.

Certain any endeavors to actually speak to the man were doomed to fail, Henrik opened his bag to pull out his sketch book and a charcoal pencil. He began to sketch a portrait of the man, taking secretive glances at him to try and get the features right. For a while, the man seemed uninterested, but ultimately ended up peeking over his shoulder, attempting to appear nonchalant. Henrik pretended he didn't notice, afraid to diminish the progress he was making. He was surprised when the pencil was taken from his hands and then his sketch book as well. The man began to sketch, biting his tongue in concentration. Henrik couldn't see what he was drawing and when he tried to peek, the man pulled away, hiding a smile.

Finally he was finished and he set the book down, presenting his drawing. It was terrible really, a messy stick figure and what could have been anything from dogs to bushes, but it may have been the best thing Henrik had ever seen. He smiled widely and reached out to take his sketch book back, his fingers accidentally brushing against the man's as he did so. As soon as they touched, the man's face steeled and he jerked away. He scowled then fell to the ground, pulling the blanket over his head. The blanket, although thick and warm looking, was rather short, so as he pulled it up in uncovered the lower half of his body. Henrik was horrified by what he saw. It was no wonder the man hadn't left this spot, he only had one leg. He must have had two before if he had bled when he was shot, which meant Henrik had cost him half of his leg.

Henrik didn't know what to do about that so stuffed his sketch book back into his bag and muttered a quiet 'sorry' before running off. He ran all the way to the wooded area before he stopped and rested

against a tree. He didn't have the lower half of his leg because Henrik had shot him. He probably hadn't even meant Henrik any actual harm when he broke into the house. The others ran as soon as they saw him so they probably didn't expect him to be there, and it didn't seem as though they had any weapons.

He pulled his knees up to his chest and buried his head into his arms, feeling sick. How was it that a criminal broke into his house and he was the one feeling guilty? He sighed and bit down on his lip. He decided then and there that he would try and make it up to him, though he didn't know how.

He walked the rest of the way to the house, dragging his feet and kicking at stray branches. There was a moment of panic when he slipped on the branch just outside the window and almost fell to the ground. Luckily he managed to grab onto the ledge and hoist himself up safely. He lay down on the bed and stared at the ceiling for a while, trying to think of ways to help the man on the street. When, an hour later, he heard the door open and shut downstairs, he still had no ideas. He reluctantly got out of bed and lumbered downstairs to greet his father. Next to Stoick was Gobber and they were both dripping wet. It had apparently started raining since Henrik had come inside. More importantly, as soon as he saw the large man, he was hit with an inspiration.

"Gobber!" he yelled. Gobber was taken aback, not used to such an enthusiastic greeting from the boy.

"I din like tha look o this," Gobber muttered to Stoick then turned to address Henrik, "alright, lad, what is it ye want?"

"What? No, I just wasn't expecting you and I remembered I promised to help out in the shop, soâ€¦" he trailed off and shrugged.

"I din think I'll ever understand ye," Gobber shook his head. "But ye do owe me some help, ye can start in the morn."

"Yeah, sure, of course," Henrik nodded enthusiastically. There was then several moments of awkward silence before Henrik made a move to leave. "I'll just, uh," he jerked his thumb towards the stairs, "yeah, I'll go up to my room. Let me know when dinners ready?"

Stoick nodded stiffly and Henrik all but ran up the stairs, slamming the door to his room shut behind him. He knew what he could do now. Maybe the man didn't have a real foot anymore, but Henrik had access to the workshop where Gobber had made his own prosthetics. With a bit of research he was sure he'd be able to construct one himself. The only problem would be keeping it a secret from Gobber.

Henrik went to the internet and begun to study the construction of prosthetic legs. When dinner came, he ate and excused himself as quickly as he could manage so that he could return to his laptop. It was past two in the morning before he decided he had researched enough, his head full of ideas and his sketchbook full of designs.

Implementing his plans turned out to be easier than he had expected. Gobber was busy consulting for Stoick with the Inger case so Henrik had plenty of free time in the workshop to craft the prosthetic

without having to worry about hiding it. It took quite a few days to finish, as well as working on other projects Gobber gave him, but he eventually had it to his liking the next Friday.

Being barely able to sleep, Henrik spent the night polishing and tweaking the leg in his room. In the morning, after Stoick left for the police station, he gathered the prosthetic and some leftover salmon into a bag and climbed out the window. He crossed his fingers as he turned the final corner, hoping the man would still be there. He was.

"Hey, hi, so, I'm really sorry about your leg," Henrik said, getting his attention. The man frowned, studying Henrik's face. "I mean, you didn't deserve that. After all, you could have offed me, like, a hundred times by now but you obviously haven't. So anyways, I wanted to, um, make it up to you? I guess. I know it's not enough butâ€¦" Henrik reached into his back and pulled out the prosthetic. It was somewhat crude he was confident it would serve its purpose. He'd even crafted an accessory that could be added so that he could wear a shoe over it.

"It's not much, but it should work," Henrik shrugged. He sat down next to him and demonstrated how it worked. "You can attach it here and it's cushioned so it won't cause you too much pain. There's a spring system here to lower impact and then this part lets you wear shoes so no one will even be able tell it's not real."

The man's eyes widened and then his brows furrowed. Henrik stood where he was for a few moments, holding the prosthetic, before he realized he couldn't get up to get it himself. So he chuckled in embarrassment and stepped forward to hand it to him. The man reached out to grab it, hesitating for a second but then grasping it firmly, as though it may disappear. Still, he did not seem to know what to do with it once he had it so Henrik sat down and demonstrated how it worked. Within minutes, they had it attached. It took a while for him to stand, given that he refused help from Henrik and instead used support from the rickety building, but soon enough he was balancing without help, unable to keep a small smile off his face. Henrik didn't even try; he was beaming, though at the same time, inspecting his work. It was perfect. It held his weight and allowed him to stand and walk with relative ease.

"It works," he breathed out in relief. "So, I guess it doesn't make up for anything, but you did break into my house, so maybe we could call it even?" he stuck his hand out to shake. The man looked at it skeptically but took it none the less. Henrik smiled and, he may have been mistaken but, it looked like the other smiled back. The moment was cut short when they heard someone yelling.

"Toothless!" they called and Henrik jerked back. He turned to see two people, one familiar. The girl that he had seen in his house that night, with the blue streak in her hair, was standing there, staring at Henrik with a bewildered look. The man with her was tall and bulky with deep blue eyes and half of his blond hair tied back. The green eyed man placed his hand on Henrik's shoulder and must have made some sort of signal to the girl because she stopped whatever she was about to say.

"Toothless," the blond man said slowly and Henrik realized that was what the dark haired man was called, "who's the kid?"

"New recruit," the woman said, shrugging.

"Yeah?" the man chuckled loudly, scrutinizing the boy, "what's he good for? Crawling through the dog doors? He looks like he'll snap like a twig. Alright, whatever, bring him with. Green Death called for a meeting andâ€¦wait a sec. Stormfly," he nudged the girl, "I thought you told me he lost his leg from infection. He's standing fine."

Toothless stepped forward to reveal the prosthetic which had been hidden behind Henrik. The girl gasped.

"Sweet," the man smirked, "now hurry up, he'll kill us if we're late." The blond man ushered Henrik forward, terrified, and the other two followed. He threw his arm around the boy's shoulder and laughed, "you look like you're being sent to the gallows kid. This your first time meeting Green Death?"

Henrik, not knowing what else to do, nodded jerkily. The blond man laughed again and clapped him on the back.

"Well, with any luck, you won't be eaten alive, so, no pressure," he shook Henrik a bit, but it only made him queasy. He had never heard of the Green Death before. The police knew the code names for a lot of the Dragons-Hookfang, Meatlug, Stormfly, etcetera- they just either couldn't put the name to the face or didn't have enough evidence on them to do anything. Green Death, however, he hadn't heard anything about that name, and he seemed to be important too.

"Toothless," the girl said, "why don't you go show Thornado how your new foot works." She pushed him forward, nearly tripping him on the prosthetic. He turned to glare at her but she only shrugged. Rolling his eyes, Toothless went to walk next to 'Thornado' and the girl pulled Henrik back to walk next to her.

"Listen," she hissed under her breath, "I don't know what you're doing with Toothless, but if you get us in trouble here, I'll have your head on a pike. Understand?" Henrik nodded. "Good. You're the police chief's boy, yeah? Henrik?"

"Henrik Hamish Haddick III," he muttered and she stifled a bit of laughter.

"Hah, poor kid. Where'd Toothless get the prosthetic then? I'm guessing that had something to do with you," she looked suspiciously between them.

"Yeah," Henrik nodded, "I made it. It was kind of my fault he lost it."

"Kind of? You _kind of_ shot him," she said sardonically, "you seriously made that though? Impressive. Names Stormfly by the way."

"Nice to meet you," Henrik nodded, giving her a small smile.

"Pleasure, I'm sure. But really, you don't want to get involved with the Green Death so stay out of sight, not that it'll be that hard

given you're like, two feet tall. Just don't cause a scene; we won't bother you and you had better not bother us. Got it?"

Henrik swallowed, that didn't sound promising in the slightest. He nodded anyways, wishing he could just go home now. Stormfly seemed to notice his discomfort and patted his shoulder then moved up to walk next to Thornado, leaving Toothless next to Henrik. Toothless was frowning, staring straight ahead without sparing a glance at the Henrik.

They walked like this for some time, though their group grew as more people, Dragons, spotted them. They all asked questions, some asked how Toothless had lost his leg, others how he had gotten it back, but mostly about who Henrik was. Stormfly deflected most of the questions and reminded the group to be on their best behavior for the Green Death.

Finally they came to a stop outside an old, deserted factory. Climbing in through a broken window (Henrik had never been so glad he'd had his tetanus shots for he must have cut himself ten times on glass or nails) and descending into the basement, Henrik found himself surrounded by more people than they had ever expected belonged to the Dragons. And in the center, with a wide berth of open space around him, stood a single man.

* * *

><p>AN: This chapter was a lot of fun and I'm looking forward to finishing Hiccup's backstory off. I hope you enjoyed it! (Also, I have no idea how arrests and things like that work, but I'm pretty sure the police aren't allowed to keep Hookfang that long without an actual trial... oh well.)

7. Henrik Hamish Haddick III: Part 2

Henrik only caught a quick glance of the man in the middle of the crowd before he was pushed against a wall with Toothless and Stormfly in front of him, blocking him from view. For a brief moment, though, he was sure they made eye contact.

"Hello, everyone," a voice bellowed. It was low and smooth, spoken softly yet carrying across the entire room. It had a rather musical quality to it, low and hypnotic, but it was also powerfully impressive. It demanded attention and as soon as it began, all other voices hushed. "I realize everyone is concerned, for our own safety as well as that of our good friend, Hookfang. Rest assured, I am doing everything I can to ensure his release. Until then, we all need to be careful. The police are watching over us more stringently than ever. At this point I don't want anyone caught for jaywalking, understood?" there were murmurs of agreement, "good, good. Now, Hookfang's arraignment will be held soon, they cannot put it off any longer. It is unlikely, but possible, that they will release him on bail until the actual trial. If this is the case, we need to be prepared so I want everyone who is able to come to me for extra assignments. If you all stay here for the night, I'll come to each of you one by one to gather what you've already collected and assign you more work. For now, that is all. As I understand it, Meatlug has food prepared for everyone. Please, help yourselves. Children first."

Another quiet chorus rang through the crowd and they began to disperse. Henrik was still trapped behind Toothless and Stormfly, neither having moved from the spot. Stormfly leaned over and was about to whisper something when the voice began again.

"Oh," it said, as though in a sudden epiphany, "I almost forgot. Toothless, Stormfly," Henrik could feel both of them tensing, "I saw you brought me a present. How about the three of you meet me first, hm?"

"Yes sir," Stormfly muttered and Henrik panicked. He considered bolting, but he knew he would never make it far, especially not with Stormfly gripping his arm the way she was. She pulled him forward and Toothless followed. When they approached the man, Henrik finally had a chance to get a good view of him. He was much taller than Henrik, taller even than Toothless. He had sharp eyes that seemed to mock Henrik as they looked him up and down, a haughty smirk on his face.

"Sir?" Stormfly broke the silence and drawing the attention of both Henrik and the man who he assumed was Green Death away from each other. The Green Death smiled.

"Yes, yes, of course," he wrapped a careful arm around Henrik's shoulder making the boy shudder. "Follow me, we shouldn't do this here."

So they followed him. They had to walk slowly so that Toothless, not used to the new leg, could keep up. His limp was prominent though he did not seem bothered. The Green Death did not appear to notice it at all, making Henrik wonder if he even knew he had lost it in the first place. Finally, they were away from the crowd and entered a small room which must have once been an office. The man sat down in a old chair and offered the other seat to Henrik, leaving the other two to stand.

"Now, you can only imagine how surprised I was to see you here," he said, resting his chin on intertwined fingers. "The son of the great police chief, Stoick Haddock, and here you are, in the lair of Dragons. You can imagine what kind of position this puts me in."

"A pretty good one I'd imagine," Henrik muttered. His words were defiantly sarcastic but he could not bring himself to look the man in the eyes. The Green Death hummed with a sort of pleasure.

"Oh, I do like you. Not nearly as dimwitted as that father of yours I see. Though, perhaps not if you were foolish enough to come here and expect to be able to leave safely," he reached forward tapped Henrik's chin twice with an index finger.

"I wasn't really expecting to come here at all," Henrik shrugged and the Green Death chuckled.

"Of course not," he withdrew his hand and leaned back in his chair, looking at Henrik as though he were judging an item on whether or not it was worth buying. "You're father would kill to know where we were. I assume you are hoping to run back to Daddy to tell him all about us? I do hope you know why that won't be possible."

"Either way, I assume you're about to tell me," Henrik frowned, noticing Stormfly's stunned look out of the corner of his eyes. She didn't seem to approve of the way he was speaking to their leader.

"Quite right," the Green Death hummed, "though we do have a few options here. You see you've given me quite an advantage. Option number one, it's not my favorite option but it's effective, is to simply kill you now. You can see why this may be necessary. You now know where our hideout is and could easily turn us in to your father. I can't let that happen.

"Option number two: we could hold you for ransom. Your head would fetch a pretty penny I'm sure; perhaps we could even negotiate a deal for the release of Hookfang. If you cooperate I'm sure it would be a painless process. There's no need for any harm to come to you.

"Option number three is my personal favorite. You join us and do whatever I ask of you. With you as one of us, we'd have a clear advantage over your dear father."

"There isn't an option four?" Henrik muttered, the Green Death seemed to understand this was a rhetorical question and simply waited so Henrik sighed. "Option one is obviously out. Option two wouldn't work for either of us; the police don't negotiate for prisoners. Option three isn't much better. I don't hold any weight with law enforcement other than Stoick being my father. I'm not even sure he's convinced we're related."

"Dear boy, you don't understand how useful you could be. Listen," he shifted forward in his seat, closer to Henrik. He placed his hands on the boy's shoulders and looked him straight in the eyes, "I like you so I'm going to give you some advice. Everyone alive today will one day be nothing but supper for worms. There are only three things that can possibly delay this fate: strength, cleverness, and luck. There isn't much anyone can do about luck and you obviously aren't doing so well on strength-"he gave Henrik's bicep a small squeeze, "-but you are clever. So you have a choice, you can side with us and someday later become worm food, or you could deny me and become my supper now," his fingers tightened dangerously, making Henrik wince and Toothless take a step forward. The Green Death sent Toothless a warning glance and he stepped back, still looking worried.

"Okay," Henrik grimaced but steeled his nerves "I'll join you, but if you tell me to do something I can't do, I'm out."

"Of course," the man pulled back, patting Henrik's arms once as he did, "but remember, should that happen, you will then be the enemy. I will not hesitate should you betray us."

"Yes sir," he replied, biting his lip and dropping his head. The answer pleased the Green Death and he started to beam.

"Wonderful," he stood, "Stormfly, have Barf and Belch take the boy home. Tell them we've recruited the son of the police chief and they should make sure to treat him as such. I doubt they will listen, but anyways, remember what I've told you, hmm, Little Supper?"

Henrik nodded and Stormfly ushered him out of the room. Before she closed the door he caught a quick glimpse of Toothless scowling as the Green Death put an arm around his shoulder. In the larger room, he was led through the crowd of Dragons. There were more people there than he would have ever imagined were part of the group, it was terrifying. Eventually Stormfly came to a stop and Henrik found himself in front of a pair of conjoined twins attached at the hip. They were identical and slightly above average height, though they looked a bit taller because of how thin and lanky they were. They had strawberry blond hair that didn't look quite right with their yellow green eyes but seemed to work well enough.

"Barf, Belch," Stormfly addressed them, "this is Henrik Hamish Haddick III, the police chief's son" the twins gaped openly "Death wants you to take him back to his house, _safely_. He'll be joining us as a new recruit."

"We've got the son of the police chief here and we're just walking him home? Have we lost our minds?" the one on the left said, eyeing Henrik suspiciously.

"We walk him home tonight and tomorrow his dad's walking us with handcuffs," the other added.

"I don't know what all this _we_ talk is," Stormfly rolled her eyes and reached out to knock their heads together, "but the Green Death's given you orders so do as you're told."

"Fine, we're on it," the right twin groaned, rubbing his head, then muttered under his breath, "she-devil."

"Bitch," the other added quietly, hiding a smirk. Stormfly was not amused. She growled menacingly but decided it was not worth it and turned on her heel, leaving Henrik alone with the twins. They approached him and he could only wonder if it was difficult for them to walk. They each had four legs and seemed to walk very naturally and in synch, but Henrik thought it must be harder than walking normally. He fell enough normally, if he was tied to someone else he was certain he would spend more time with his face on the ground than his feet.

The twins circled Henrik, looking him over carefully and humming occasionally. There was an almost carnivorous look in their eyes that made him swallow nervously. When it had been just Toothless on the streets, it was easy to forget that he was a Dragon, part of a group of criminals his father would kill to get his hands on. This had been a shocking reminder.

"He looks like he's gonna throw up," the twins stopped in front of Henrik and stared, stroking their chins thoughtfully.

"He really does. Not sure I blame 'im though. Pretty sure if I was the police chief's kid and I'd just met the Green Death, I'd be pretty freaked out too."

"What's wrong kid? You're not afraid the big guy's gonna get revenge or anything, are you?"

"I mean you're only the son of the man who arrested our innocent brethren."

"But he can't possibly hold anything against you."

They were smiling wickedly, apparently attempting to intimidate Henrik. He would admit that, yes, he was very afraid of the Green Death, but he was focusing on something else.

"Is he really innocent? Hookfang, I mean," he asked, flinching a bit away from the pair who had gotten very close.

"You're kidding, right?" the right twin scoffed and pulled away.

"Of course he's innocent," the other said, "you think we just go around killing kids for no reason? What the hell would we get from that?"

"You were just threatening me, like, two seconds ago. How should I know whether or not you kill kids," good choice Henrik, mouthing off to Dragons while smack in the middle of their nest seems like a great plan. He must have a death wish.

"You listen to me," the right one jerked forward, pulling his twin along with him. He grabbed a hold of Henrik's collar and pulled him up so he had to stand on his toes to avoid choking. "We do some shit you people look down on or whatever, but we don't kill seven year old kids. Your father and his mindless cronies were just looking for an excuse to lock him up. It's bullshit."

"Alright," Henrik choked out, "I was just asking; I'm sorry."

"Damn right," he spat, throwing Henrik back down. Henrik stumbled at the sudden force and fell to his knees, but he quickly got back to his feet. "Now come on, we still have to take you home."

Henrik nodded and they turned their backs and immediately started weaving their way through the crowd. He had to hurry to keep up and not lose them. When they reached the stairs, Henrik turned his head to get one last look at the group of young men and women. In the back, behind everyone else, he could see Toothless staring back at him. The man watched him for a moment, frowning, before he turned away and disappeared into the mass of people. Henrik turned back and realized the twins had gotten ahead of him. He rushed to catch up and they made their way out of the old building, checking first to make sure no one was around to see them.

The rest of the trip back to Henrik's house was quiet and uncomfortably nerve wracking. It had gotten dark and Henrik tripped a few times on tree roots and weeds. The twins had begun to lose the last of their patience when they finally made it. Henrik smiled nervously then walked awkwardly to the tree that led to his room. He could see the pair watching him as he climbed, probably laughing when nearly slipped on a branch.

When Henrik made it inside he immediately threw off his shoes and climbed under the covers of his bed without changing his clothes. He had a lot of thinking to do. He could tell his dad about the Dragons and their hideout, but he couldn't see that ending well. They would know where they were but they still didn't have any evidence against the lot of them, let alone the Green Death himself. If he turned them in, the man would certainly want revenge. That wasn't something

Henrik could risk. He also didn't want any harm to come to Toothless, he'd grown attached to him (and Stormfly as well, he supposed, she seemed okay so far).

Alternatively, he could do what the Green Death told him, whatever that would be. The thought of it made his stomach twist. Whatever it was, it would probably be illegal. He didn't know if he could do that, and if he couldn't—well, he didn't like his odds. He guessed he would have to just wait and see what was asked of him before making any decisions.

Worst came to worst, he could always run away and join the circus, travel the world. He'd have an act as the clumsiest, most awkward kid in the northern hemisphere, maybe the world. He would sleep with the clowns if he was lucky, with the lions if he wasn't, and maybe learn to juggle. That was a terrible idea in retrospect. He would never be able to juggle successfully. He would just stick with the lions.

He barely sleep at all that night. He pretended to when Stoick came home and opened the door to check on him, but otherwise he sat and chewed on his thumb trying to come up with ways to get out of his situation. He dozed off around four in the morning and woke up at precisely seven (he'd forgot to change his alarm for the weekend and it was still set as though he had to wake up for school).

He was about to go down for breakfast when he noticed a slip of paper on his window sill. He knew it must have been from the Dragons, his father would never leave a note and he would have noticed it if it was there before. He walked over to the window, half expecting to see Barf and Belch right outside staring at him, and inspected the papers. There was an envelope and another sheet of paper on top of it. The envelope read 'Do not read,' so Henrik unfolded the paper.

'Dear Little Supper,' it read 'for your first task as a Dragon, I need you to find a way to deliver this letter to Hookfang. You should understand why we can't do it ourselves. Please let Toothless know when you've completed the task. Best of luck.'

It wasn't signed but 'Little Supper' made it pretty obvious who it was from. Henrik swallowed and set the letter aside so that he could change his clothes. When he was dressed he folded the letter and shoved it into his pocket. Downstairs he found his father already sitting at the breakfast table with a bowl of cereal and bags under his eyes.

"Hey, Dad," Henrik muttered, grabbing a bowl for himself and sitting across from him. Stoick grunted in response, taking a gulp of coffee. Stoick never sipped his coffee; even if it was scalding hot he had to drink it in large gulps. Nothing the man did was small.

"So Dad, I was wondering," Henrik fidgeted and played with his spoon, "do you think I could come into the station with you today? It's just that I kept hearing noises yesterday and I'm kind of nervous. I know there's patrol outside and everything but I thought, maybe, it'd be okay if I came in?"

"Henrik," Stoick sighed, "the officers watching the house are fully capable of keeping ye safe, nothing is going to happen ta ye if ye just stay in the house."

"I know," Henrik looked down and tapped his spoon against his bowl, "I know. I was just nervous, you know? If it's a problem, I'll just stay here."

Stoick rubbed his eyes then dragged his hand the rest of the way down his face. "Alright," he said finally, "ye can come wi me, but ye have ta promise ta stay oot o ma way, understood?"

"Yeah, sure, I'll just sit and do my homework or something. I won't be in the way at all," Henrik nodded and his fingers went down to brush the piece of paper hidden in his pocket. He was very tempted to open it and read what was inside before delivering it, but knew that wasn't in his best interest.

After Stoick had finished getting ready and Henrik gathered his homework and sketch book they drove to the station. There was nearly five minutes of silence in the car before Henrik thought to turn the radio on. It was tuned in on a news station until the Inger case came up so, when Stoick frowned deeply, Henrik changed it to a music station. He didn't particularly like any of the music they were playing, and he could tell Stoick didn't either, but it felt too awkward to try and change it again so he left it.

The station was packed with officers and the like bustling by and jostling Henrik. It seemed like everyone they passed had to stop them to speak with Stoick so it took them forever to get anywhere. Finally Stoick pointed out a bench in the lobby and left Henrik to stay there.

"Just stay put an_ please_ din cause any trouble," he said in parting, leaving Henrik alone with his backpack.

"I can't promise anything," Henrik muttered to himself more than to Stoick, who didn't appear to hear it anyways. He sat down and pulled out his trigonometry book, turning to their current chapter. He only paid half attention to the book, keeping an eye on the people in the room. The crowded lobby was slowly thinning out until only the receptionist and a man and a woman on benches across the room remained. The woman was deathly thin with sunken cheeks, dark eyes and a twitch in her fingers while the man was large with a leather jacket and an unkempt beard. Henrik didn't pay them much mind until another man came in and, after speaking to the receptionist, went and sat on the bench next to Henrik's. He chuckled, just loud enough for the newcomer to hear.

"What's yer problem kid," he sneered, looking sideways at him.

"What, no, I'm sorry," Henrik fought to hide his smile so as not to give away his lie, "it's just that man over there was giving you a few rather rude gestures."

"Oi," he called across the room to the man in the leather jacket, "you got a problem with me?"

Before Henrik could shove his text book back into his bag the men had broken into a fight. It escalated even further when another man and woman entered the lobby and it turned into an all out brawl. Soon even police officers had joined in the scuffle. Henrik dashed out of

the room and down the hall to the left, entering the third room on the right. It was where they kept people awaiting trial. The two guards there were familiar, having been over to Henrik's house for dinner before.

"Henrik, boy, what are you doing here?" the taller one asked.

"Sorry, it's just there's this big fight in the lobby so I thought I should find someone," Henrik explained, shuffling his feet. This was it, if he was going to deliver the letter, it had to be now.

"Shit," the shorter one swore, "alright kid, stay here and don't talk with any of them," he kicked the bars, "we'll be right back." They hurried out of the room, hands readied on their hips to pull their guns if needed. Henrik let out a breath of relief. It had worked.

There were three men currently imprisoned; he recognized one of them as Hookfang. He was very tall with a shock of messy red hair and freckles. He, and one of the others, was staring straight at Henrik with a smirk.

"Are you, Hookfang?" he asked quietly, approaching the bars. The man snorted.

"Yeah, I'm Hookfang," he replied, standing and approaching where Henrik stood. He grabbed onto the bars and stared down at him. Henrik wasn't very tall in the first place, so staring up at the man he felt as though he were two feet tall, "you come to see the man accused of murder? Some dare from the kids at school?"

"No," Henrik stood his ground, "I mean, I came to see you but not because I have something for you," he pulled the letter out of his pocket and shoved it through the bars. Hookfang took it, peering suspiciously at it.

"Little Supper?" he mused, reading the envelope before tearing it open. He read it carefully, smirking at first then frowning, then smirking again and finally laughing loudly.

"Gods, kid, you really got yourself in trouble," he laughed but then his smile slipped, "listen, I appreciate the help or whatever, but it's not worth it. You're getting mixed up in shit you don't want to be mixed up in. Once Green Death digs his claws into you, he's not going to let you go."

"Don't you want to get out? The, um, Barf and Belch seemed sure you were innocent," Henrik frowned.

"I didn't kill the girl," Hookfang ran a hand through his hair and pace a bit in the cell. "I didn't kill her but I'm going to plead guilty at my arraignment. So whatever he has you doing, stop it. Go home and don't leave, don't even go to school if that's what it takes. Your dad's a cop, have him keep you safe."

"If you didn't do it, why are you pleading guilty?" Henrik asked, biting his lip. Something didn't fit right and it was making him uneasy.

"Listen- what's your name?" Hookfang stopped pacing and faced him.

"Henrik Hamish Haddick III," he supplied, waiting for the amused look or laugh that always came when he introduced himself. Sure enough, Hookfang snorted in delight.

"H-h-h-h. What were your parents thinking or do they just hate you? Alright Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, listen, the real world doesn't follow the nice little laws you like to think it does. Guilty or not guilty, I'm pretty much fucked, so I may as well just accept a life of bartering for cigarettes in prison."

"You butchered my name," Henrik muttered. Hookfang pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed, clearly frustrated. Henrik wasn't trying to piss him off, but he seemed to have a talent for getting on the wrong sides of people. He would honestly like stay as far away from the Green Death as possible, he just couldn't see how. He also had this niggling curiosity. If Hookfang was truly innocent, which he wouldn't bet money on just yet, then who did kill the girl? And why as he willing to take the fall for it? He had his theories, and none of them were

"Just stay out of our shit, for your own good," Hookfang barked and threw the letter to the ground at Henrik's feet. He turned on his heel and sat against the far wall, closing his eyes and turning his head away. Henrik stood and fidgeted.

"I don't know how," he whispered, only just loud enough for Hookfang to hear. The tall man shifted in his spot and Henrik realized he wasn't planning to answer so he reached down to pick up the letter. As he left the room he thought he heard Hookfang answer, though it was quiet and grave and Henrik could only half say he wasn't imagining it.

"Run."

He sounded earnest and insistent that Henrik nearly panicked and ran right then. As it was, he walked briskly past the still active mess in the lobby and to a bench in a connecting hallway. He collapsed onto it and ran his fingers over the letter. He hadn't read it earlier because he would have had to open the envelope and Hookfang would have surely noticed. But Hookfang had thrown the letter back at him. No one would know if he read it now. Still his fingers trembled as he unfolded the sheet of paper and he felt as though he had to hide from anyone walking down the hallway.

Hookfang, the letter read, _I hope this letter finds you wellâ€"_Henrik thought that was a rather tactless comment considering the situationâ€"_You have obviously met my new little friend. He is the son of Stoick and I believe he will be very useful in securing your freedom. You can imagine my surprise when Toothless brought him to a meetingâ€"_The letter went on to describe more of how Henrik had found himself at the Green Death's mercy, including the loss of Toothless's leg (Henrik was surprised Hookfang hadn't commented on that, but perhaps the two weren't close).

_I want you to keep doing as you have been. Say nothing to the police and I will take care of everything. If I have any news for you I will send it by way of our new little friend. I'll keep in touch and

remember what we've talked about._

The note was then signed in flawless cursive. Henrik turned the paper over to check if there was anything on the other side, but that was it. He had expected there to be much more, expected there would at least be something important, but that was all there was. Then it hit him. This had been a test. The Green Death had only wanted to test Henrik to see if he could successfully deliver a message to Hookfang. Henrik crumpled the sheet angrily and shoved it into his backpack. He felt as though he had been used and made a fool of and all for something entirely pointless.

He looked into his backpack and contemplated returning to studying, but felt as though he were too worked up to do so. Instead, he pulled the zipper shut and slung the bag over his shoulder. The lobby had cleared only slightly so he stopped by the front desk and asked the receptionist to tell his father he had gone home, not entirely sure she had heard him over the commotion but not caring. He considered for a moment actually doing as he said and going straight home, but couldn't resist stopping by to see if Toothless was in the usual spot.

He was there, along with Stormfly and the twins, Barf and Belch. Henrik almost turned and ran when he saw the others but Stormfly noticed him first and called him over. He took a breath, holding it all in his cheeks for a couple of seconds then letting it out all at once. He approached the group slowly and tensely, not knowing what face he should be making in this situation. He tried smiling a bit when he got closer, but then he just felt dumb so he dropped it.

"Hey kid," Stormfly stepped away from the wall and uncrossed her arms. Henrik nodded. "You get our message?"

"Yeah, I delivered the message and passed his little test," Henrik allowed a bit of spite into his voice but regretted it when he saw her raise her eyebrow, though the other three snickered quietly. It wasn't her fault what the Green Death chose to do with his new messenger boy.

"Already?" the right twin dragged the other forward, disbelief in his eyes.

"Um, yeah, already. I thought that was what I was supposed to do," Henrik looked between them, hoping he hadn't done anything wrong.

"No, that's what he wanted. We just didn't expect you to be done so quickly. He gave you at least a week to get it done," Stormfly answered, patting his shoulder comfortingly. Henrik licked his lips, finding they had gotten very dry. He noticed Toothless was still sitting against the wall, watching the rest of them. Henrik wondered if his leg was bothering him. When no one said anything further he walked closer and sat down beside him, letting his bag fall to the ground. He pulled his knees to his chest and dropped his head into them. It had been a long day. He was surprised when he felt Toothless wrap an arm around him and ruffle his hair. He didn't raise his head but smiled into his knees. It was a nice feeling.

"Not that this isn't adorable or anything, but I'd kind of like to

know what Hookfang had to say," one of the twins interrupted, which one, Henrik couldn't tell without looking. He raised his head, hiding his smile by biting his lip.

"He didn't say much, butâ€" Henrik paused for a moment, trying to sort out what he should or should not say. He probably shouldn't mention anything he had read in the note itself, though that wasn't much, in case they reported back to Green Death that he had disobeyed him. He didn't know how they'd take Hookfang's decision to plead guilty, but supposed it was their right to know, "he wants to plead guilty."

There was silence for several seconds and Henrik noticed Toothless's grip around his shoulder tightened slightly while the other three stared at him in disbelief. Henrik began to fidget, not knowing what else to say and not feeling comfortable with everyone's attention on him. Finally the left twin spoke.

"You're kidding right," he snarled, "because if you are it's not fucking funny." They took a step forward but stopped when Toothless let out his own snarl. "What!" he started again, "you can't possibly be siding with him here! Hookfang didn't do shit, why would he want to go to jail?"

"Sorry, that's just what he told me," Henrik murmured, rubbing his arms as though he were cold. "If it helps, I believe that he's innocent."

The twins both opened their mouths to speak but Stormfly beat them to it. "That means a lot Henrik, thank you," she glared at the twins until they sighed and nodded, consenting. Henrik stayed there a while longer, relating the details of his 'visit' to Hookfang then simply chatting. The twins cooled down a bit and even began to act friendly (he even found out which twin was which). It was strange how well he seemed to get along with the lot of them. He'd never gotten on this well with any of his peers, but felt quite at home with a group of criminals. He was even laughing at the jokes the twins were cracking once they warmed up to him a bit. He was able to forget about the whole mess and was genuinely enjoying himself, but the sun was dropping low in the sky and he knew he would have to leave soon. He told the others as much and began on his way home.

He had made the trip back to the house enough times now he was confident in getting around unnoticed. Most people were staying inside nowadays anyways so it wasn't likely he would run into anyone. Unfortunately today happened to be the day he did. As he turned a corner he found himself knocking straight into another person with enough force that he fell backwards onto the hard sidewalk. He stood up, rubbing his tail bone, and looked at the offender who had knocked him down. He was face to face with Astrid Hofferson.

He was screwed. Both of Astrid's parents worked with Stoick. They were sure to tell him she found him wandering about town instead of going straight home. His father would lock him away in his room and never let him out. He would have to be homeschooled.

"What are you doing out here?" she asked, raising one eyebrow curiously. Henrik scrambled to come up with an excuse.

"Oh, you know," he swung his arms and rocked back onto his heels a

few times, trying, and failing, to appear nonchalant, "just getting some exercise."

"In skinny jeans?" Astrid raised an eyebrow and jerked her head to move her bangs from her face, "you're not even sweating."

Well shit. "No, I know," Henrik stumbled to try and think of an excuse, "I just forgot my, uh, workout clothes at school, in the locker rooms. So I'm just going to go get them now," he laughed a bit, awkwardly and turned on his heel to rush away but was stopped by her hand against his chest.

"Neither your house or the school is on this side of town and you've been acting really strange in school so I don't know what you think you're doing, but I'm watching you," Astrid stared him down. He was not happy to admit he was shorter than her and found her exceptionally intimidating. If he hadn't across from the Greed Death just the day before, he would have said she was the most terrifying person he'd met sans his father, who he had been around enough that he was really more annoying than scary. "My parents work with your dad so I know all about the break in and I know you aren't supposed to leave the house. Do you think this is some sort of game? A little girl died, Henrik, and you're the son of the police chief who happened to arrest the member of the gang who did it. So whatever you're doing, stop it."

She shoved him back a bit in emphasis but apparently had said her part as she then turned and stalked away. Henrik rubbed his sore chest, from where she had shoved him, and muttered incomprehensibly under his breath. He was definitely screwed now. Astrid would tell her parents who would tell Stoick who would lock him in his room, board all the windows, and never let him out. Then the Green Death would probably have some goons break down his door and murder him for not doing his part as a dragon. He was as good as dead.

* * *

><p>AN:** This took longer than expected and it's still not the end of the backstory. Oops. hopefully you and Jack are enjoying this story because there is more to come, though it is hard to write with school and shit.

End
file.